VALMIKI'S RAMAYANA

DAILY READINGS

VALMIKI'S

RAMAYANA

DAILY READINGS

A new, novel and challenging presentation of the original Ramayana of Valmiki

BY

SIVA PADA RENU

SWAMI

VENKATE SANANDA

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are offered to:

Sri-La-Sri Pandrimalai Samikal of Madras for his gracious foreword.

Susan Thomas for editing.

Kalyani McAlister for typing the manuscript.

Les McAlister and Erica Leon for proof-reading.

Renos Papadopoulos for his assistance.

A few friends of swami Venkatesananda whose personal donations to Swamiji during his tour of South Africa in 1978-1979 were utilised to republish this precious scripture. Among them:

H.H. Swami Sahajananda. Mr. J.L. Gihwala, Mrs. Hope Hagens, Mr. B. Lodhia, Mr. G. Munsook, Saras Naidoo, The Naik family of Johannesburg and Mrs. K.S. Pather.

Published by:

The Chiltern Yoga Trust

P.o. Elgin 7180

Cape Province

South Africa

Contents

Dedicated
Foreword
Publishers' Note
Preface
Introduction
Prayer
Free translation
Bala Kandam
Boyhood of Rama
Ayodhya Kandam
Life in Ayodhya
Aranya Kandam
The Forest Life
Kiskindha Kandam
Rama's stay in Kiskindha
Sundara Kandam
Beautiful Exploits of Hanuman
Yuddha Kandam
The Great War
Uttara Kandam
Period after Coronation
Appendix Notes
Glossary

Dedicated

Humbly Dedicated to

MY GURUDEV SWAMI SIVANANDA

Gurudev Swami Sivananda and Siva-Pada-Renu, Swami Venkatesananda
(The title "Siva-Pada-Renu" means "The Dust of Gurudev Sivananda's Feet".)

Sri-La-Sri Pandrimalai Samikal with Swami Venkatesananda

Sri-La-Sri Pandrimalai Samikal with Swami Venkatesananda

Foreword

His Holiness Sri-La-Sri Pandrimalai Samikal

Lord Sri Rama is Dharmavatara. The Supreme Brahman had come down to this mundane earth taking the form of Sri Rama to annihilate evil men and establish Dharma on a solid and radiant pedestal. Parasurama, the earlier Avatara of the supreme, had wiped out the arrogant and selfish tyrants of the kshatriya race like Kartaveeryarjuna. Ramavatara preaches the truth, that Dharma or righteous conduct according to the scriptures alone enables one to attain all the purusharthas or the ends of life enunciated for perfect life in this world. The vicious Ravana who terrorized gods and men had to be annihilated to establish this rule of Dharma in Ramavatara.

Maharshi Valmiki out of his unbounded grace gave to this world the epic of Ramayana.

Swami Venkatesanandaji is blessed by his guru and has obtained the grace of God. He is unassuming and simple. In his own inimitable style he has brought out in his book "Valmiki's Ramayana", not only the grand life of Sri Rama but also the esoteric import of the epic, for the benefit of the common individual.

May the efforts of Swami Venkatesanandaji come to fruition. By the grace of Lord Almighty I bless Swami Venkatesanandaji and those who compiled and printed the book and also all those who study this book.

(English translation of the text in Tamil which follows.)

ஓம்

SRI-LA-SRI PANDRIMALAI SAMIKAL
"OM NAMASIVAYAM"
3/1, VILLAGE ROAD, NUNGAMBAKKAM, MADRAS-600 034
Camp: Divine Life Society,
Rose Hill, Mauritius. Phones: 811777, 856

Date 14.3.197

ஸ்ரீ திருமயிலாணின் அவதாரம் திருமண அவ-
தாரம் ஆகும். யுகம் யுகத்திற்கு பரப்பிரம்மம் புரு-
கத்தில் தோன்டுகின்றன இதில் பரிபாலனம் செய்யு-
காதலை தினது ஒரு அம்சமாக மானிடமெடுத்து
அவதாரம் எடுக்கிறார். பரசுராம அவதாரத்தில்
கார்த்தி வீர்ய அர்ச்சுனனையும் மற்றவர்களையும்
அடக்கி தர்மத்தை நிலைநாட்டினார். கிருஷ்ண அவதாரத்-
தில் புதுவாழ்க்கையில் அறத்தின் வழியே மானிடனுக்கு
நீடுதிறமை என்ற பாடமும் உள்ளதை உலகத்திற்கு
விளக்குவதற்காகவே திருந்தை வெல் மிதிலை மந்திரியின்
என்பதற்கு ஏற்றுக்கொண்டபடி வனவாசம் என்று
தோன்டுகின்றனும் வைத்து, இராவணனை அனுமதியுடன்
தர்மத்தை காப்பாற்றுகிறார். அந்த பாடமும் உண்-
மையை இராமாயணமும் என்ற காவிய வடிவமாக
மகரிஷி வால்மீகி அவர்கள் உலகத்திற்கு அளித்தார்கள்

OM

SRI-LA-SRI PANDRIMALAI SAMIKAL

"OM NAMASIVAYAM"

3/1, VILLAGE ROAD, NUNGAMBAKKAM, MADRAS - 600 034

Phones: 811777, 85663

Date

ஸ்ரீ சிவாகமயோனியின் சிஷ்யையை சிவாயி வெங்கடேசுவரா அவர்கள், அவர்களுக்கு உரித்தான தினசரி கடமையில் சிஷ்யையும் அதன் தீக்ஷையையும் ~~சிவதீக்ஷை~~ மந்திரங்களின் நன்மைக்காக பலமுறையும் செய்து புத்ரக வழியில் அனுஷ்டிவரும்படி வெளியிட்டிருக்கிறார். அவர்களது முயற்சி வெற்றியடையவும், மக்கள் பயனடையவும் எல்லாம் வல்ல தென்பாண்டி நான் பிரார்த்திக்கிறேன்.

சிவாயி வெங்கடேசுவரா அவர்கள் தினமும் அதிகாலை எழுவார். பக்தியோடு இவரை வணங்குவோர் அதிகம். அவரது வெங்கடேசுவரா அவர்களுக்கும், இல்லத்தரசிக்கும் அனைத்து அன்பர்களுக்கும், படிப்பவர்களுக்கும் எனது ஆசிகள் உரித்தாகுக.

Pantrimalai Swamigal

கண்டபராந்தகன்

PUBLISHERS NOTE

Valmiki's Ramayana follows the same pattern as The Song of God (The Bhagavad Gita), The Book of God (Srimad Bhagavatham) and The Supreme Yoga (Yoga Vasistha). The study of these sacred texts is greatly Facilitated by the day-to-day style. Read one page a day and contemplate the meaning; by the end of the year you have covered the entire ground.

From the chapter or chapters selected for each page, a verse has been chosen for transliteration. This verse appears at the top of the page. In the body of the story the translation of that verse is underlined. The translation is not always literal. Some additional foot-notes have also been included in an appendix.

At the end of the volume is the glossary, which serves the purpose of a who's who. The reader is requested to refer to these before commencing the study of the text.

The left-hand edge of the first line on each page gives the number of the book (kandam). The right-hand edge of the same line gives the number of the chapter or chapters condensed on that page.

Valmiki's Ramayana is divided into seven books.

I Bala Kandam

11 Ayodhya Kandan

111 Aranya Kandam

IV Kiskindha Kandan

V Sundara Kandam

VI Yuddha Kandam

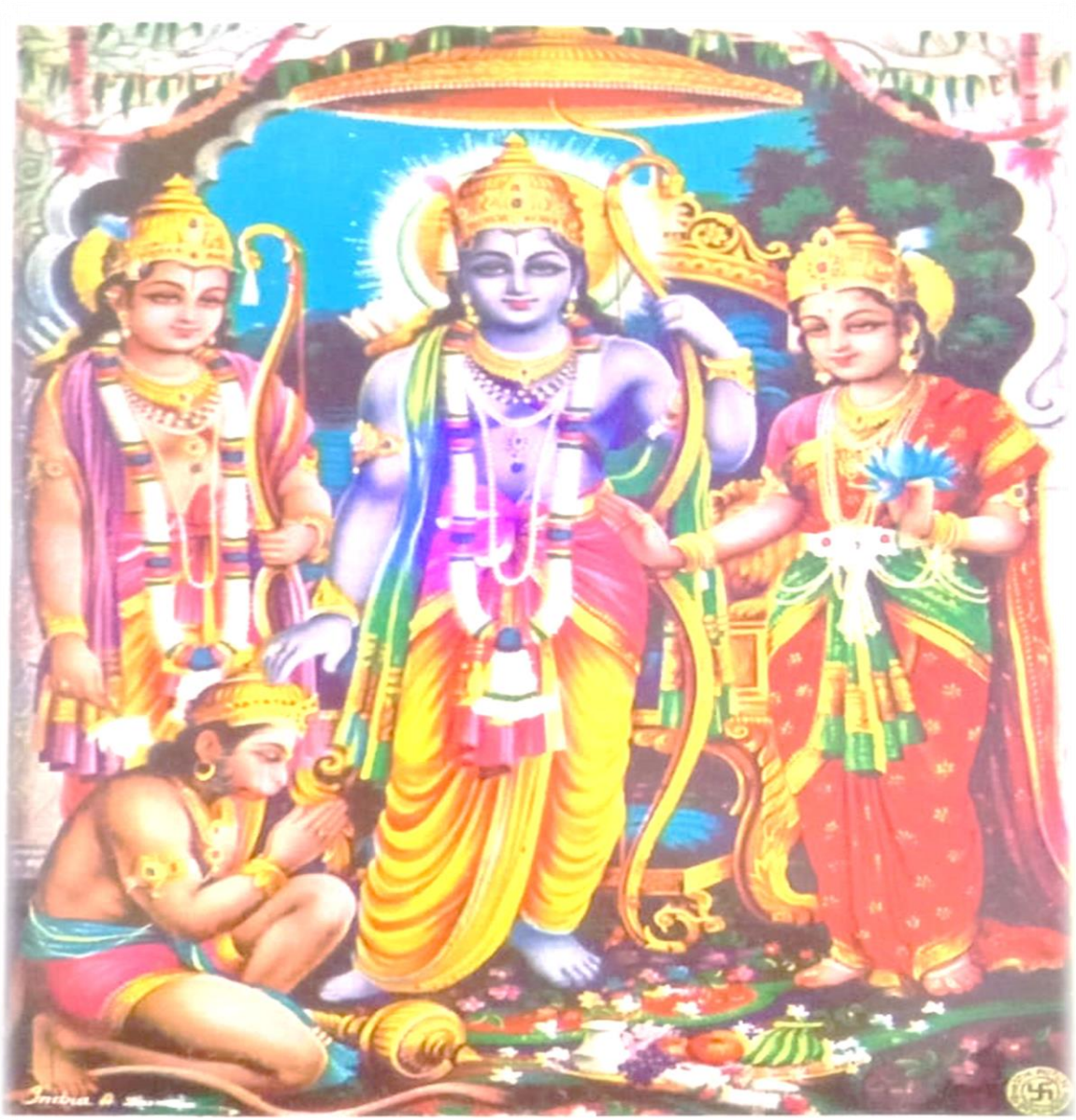
VII Uttara Kandam

SCHEME OF TRANSLITERATION

Vowels	A a I i	U u r r	I e ai	O au m	H
Consonats:					
Gutturals	K	Kh	G	Gh	N
Palatals	C	Ch	J	Jh	N

Cerebrals	T	Th	D	Dh	N
Dentals	T	Th	D	Dh	N
Labials	P	Ph	B	Bh	M
Semi vowels	Y	R	I	V	
Sibilants	S	As in	Sun		
	S	Palatal	Sibilant		
	S	Cerebral	Sibilant as	In shun	
Aspirate	H				

PLEASE NOTE: To facilitate reading the Sanskrit transliteration, occasional- ly words are split and diacritical marks adjusted accordingly.



Ram Laxman Sita

PREFACE

Before we begin with the text, a few remarks concerning the history and the geography of Ramayana may not be out of place.

In the book Towards Aquarius Vera W. Reid has the follow- ing to say about the dates: "The Ramayana, which made his (Rama's) name immortal, was written in its present form in the fourth century B.C. Yet there is no doubt that it was an Indian epic orally taught and transmitted hundreds -- perhaps thousands of years earlier. Thus it contains valuable records of religious and

social life in periods for which no historical records are available. It also suggests that Rama was an actual and not, as at first thought, a mythical character. For in this poem the planetary positions, as they are said to have been at the time of his birth, are given in detail. This constitutes the first personal horoscope in existence and establishes the fact that the person for whom it was made was born sometime prior to 3102 B.C.- probably somewhere about 5,000 B.C."

It might have been an Indian epic, but there is little doubt that the present India is not where Rama lived. The fact that there is a place called Ayodhya in present-day India is no proof that Rama was an Indian. There is a Bethlehem in a dozen countries of the world.

Surely, the geography of the earth was very different seven or ten thousand years ago: and scientists have various theories concerning the drifting continents, tidal waves, a great flood, etc. I even venture to suggest that such cataclysms were brought about by a great war in which very powerful nuclear weapons were rather freely used. I am convinced that at least the Lanka on which the great war took place was submerged in the great flood that followed the abuse of nu- clear weapons. The present Sri Lanka was certainly not the Lanka of Ramayana: I have often felt that southern Africa answers the description of Lanka to some extent. Maybe, the Dandaka forest was an African jungle. And, the ocean that was crossed was some big lake like the present lake Victoria which could have also been turned into land by underwater nuclear testing and its consequent volcanic eruptions. Pursuing this line of thought, one would surmise that Rama's kingdom was some- where in the present-day middle east. Incidentally, Hazor, in Israel contains the ruins of twenty-one cities one on top of the other; Parasurama (who challenged Rama soon after Rama's wedding is said to have destroyed the Ksatriyas (unrighteous rulers) twenty-one times.

The fact that Ramayana is in Sanskrit is no justification to claim that it is Indian: Sanskrit came to India along with the Aryans who migrated from the Arctic Circle via central and west Asia to India. The Ramayana might indeed be part of the history of the Aryans during this migratory period.

The weapons used were undoubtedly nuclear; if not something worse that modern science has yet to discover. It is interest- ing to see that the weapons

were fashioned by "sages" but not used by them: the scientist-academician today similarly fashions the missiles which the men of the armed forces use.

"Demons" were not special superhuman or subhuman beings; I feel that the word "demon" has no greater significance than the word "enemy" in a war. Each side of the combat calls the other "enemy".

A close study of the text itself encourages us to think that Rama's forces were not comprised of monkeys, bears and such other creatures, but that such words denote the names of certain hill tribes. It is possible that certain stories that lend support to their subhuman nature were interpolations by a later witty poet who indulged in harmless fun (and pun) to make the story more interesting.

I have invariably taken "flying" to mean, using an air- craft: on the analogy of our own times when we often say: "Mr.... flew to Japan." The descriptions suggest several types of such craft in use then.

Ramayana is undoubtedly pre-history. Why should we study it? The study of history has not proved beneficial, for every student of history finds a lot in it to strengthen his bias. However, when the Ramayana is studied as a scripture, a different feeling is experienced: since the racial or regional characteristics of the characters are masked, we 'see' in the scripture a mirror in which our own heart and mind are reflected. Rama then becomes the Divine in our own heart, Sita is symbolic of any great passion (our faith, ideology, etc.), and Ravana is the aggregate of the (ten) senses. One may derive from this what wisdom one is equipped to derive!

INTRODUCTION

If you dismiss the Ramayana as a myth or as a poet's fancy, you are throwing a treasure away. If on the other hand you' regard it as a scripture to be devoutly worshipped and read, you are blind to the treasure.

That the Ramayana --at least the original Valmiki's version of it -- is a simple historical document need not be doubted. There may be exaggerations in it; there is a lot of exaggeration in the morning newspaper. But, when it is studied as history, it does not yield its benefits either. In spite of the fact that the narrative effectively veils the tribal identities of the heroes, you tend to take sides, identify yourself with one or the other, indulge in judgements, all of which inevitably generate violence in your own heart.

As a historical document, it is a simple record of events. The narrator, however, cannot help rationalising the actions of the hero and the villain and insinuating motives to them. The modern psychologist does this all the time. Such analysis exists only in the analyst's mind, and it may have no basis at all. "Why did Rama do so, or Ravana do so?": and the only answer is "Rama did so; Ravana did so." You and I may now find a new rationalisation by declaring that Rama's were spontaneous actions arising from choiceless awareness of each situation; that Rama's were consistent actions in as much as they were appropriate actions. But these ideas are your own projection.

In all this, the Ramayana is still away from you, and you are treating Rama, Ravana and others as objects of your psycho- analytic study. Instead, wisdom lies in studying the text so that it is assimilated, so that it becomes you, and then the treasure is yours.

You will then immediately realise the nature, the origin, the course and the climax of violence.

The earth has been inhabited by humanity. Successive generations have branded the previous ones as devils, demons, etc., and given vent to aggressive feelings and actions. If you believe in a soul and reincarnation, you may even see in all this no change except the external change of form and fashion. The question is not of history nor pre-history (legend), but the present is all this hostility, hate and killing necessary or meaningful?

People often condemn war; but no one traces it to its cause. What causes create the climate for war? Poverty or the unequal distribution of the earth's natural resources. A big gap in living standards created by the exploitation of man by man. Creation of vested interests and the suggestion of superiority and inferiority to protect those vested interests. Often these are the very things that are called signs of culture and civilisation.

The conflict between self-interests builds up, and with all the best forces of light in this world, the climax (war) is inevitable. But then there is a subtle and extremely vicious element in war. Even if you consider that it is human for the oppressed to fight the oppressor, how does it lead to war be- tween two communities? Real self-defence is individualistic; and one who does not consider that the other man is vicious and that he is directly responsible for one's own suffering does not fight in self defence. Yet, clever people flourish in the world who are able to introduce concepts of nation, community and such other myths, thus persuading a man to kill another man who is totally unknown to him and who may have nothing whatsoever to do with his own suffering, both of them being equally unfortunate victims of clever propaganda.

When thus two communities are contaminated with hate and hostility, it seems as though God who is common to all says: "Well, where there is hate, fighting is inevitable; but I shall not take sides and fight." Lord Krishna said so. In the battle, all the wicked ones are destroyed. A new civilisation comes in- to being.

Somehow such wholesale extermination of peoples rights it- self, in the long run. Somehow, also, an evil force is balanced -- often, alas, by another which soon becomes the powerful evil factor.

Undoubtedly, many innocent people are also killed in wars. It may sound callous and cruel to say so, but I feel that these innocent victims of genocide are the ones who have reached the acme of spiritual perfection, and freed from even the instinct of self-defence and the impulse to resist evil, have realised that their time has come for Moksha or final liberation.

But, war and violence do not solve any problem. In every war or violent revolution there is always a victor and a victim. Immediately after the event the victor has the last word and very often in justifying his own acts of violence, he tries to prove that he was the real victim and that somehow (by

God's grace) he survived. He never admits his contribution to the original problem. However, in course of time the victor, on account of power and prosperity which invariably corrupt his moral strength, becomes weak and vicious. His descendants -- who may in all probability be the re-incarnations of his own former victims -- overpower him.

Violence and its rationalisation can be abolished if one adopts the following attitude: if it is my duty to protect my culture, religion, family, tradition, etc., and if in that attempt to protect I have to resort to violent actions which involve harming others (which is obviously contrary to my culture, religion, etc.), I should punish myself in order to protect the dharma that I have thus violated, and not rationalise my violence and assume that I have a divine right to rule the world. If, honestly, it is dharma you wish to protect, then you are as guilty as the other person: and if the victim and the victor simultaneously exit from the world it is possible that dharma will survive.

The theory that God himself incarnates to protect the good and to destroy the evil is a double-edged sword and has to be handled with care if you do not wish to leave it alone! If it tempts you to feel that you are the good that the Lord wants to protect (oftentimes through your own might), then you have destroyed yourself. This theory has only one meaning: it points out to you that if you believe in it you have a very heavy responsibility to be good and to do good.

It is possible that Rama was non-violent and that even Ravana was non-violent. In support of this let me give a couple of quotations:

The following is from The Theory of Celestial Influence by R. Collins: "... having fully understood that all men are responsible for war, it is next necessary to understand that no one is responsible. From another point of view war can be seen as a purely cosmic phenomenon, produced by celestial influence on a scale where men's reasons and men's feelings have no significance whatsoever. A certain planet, at a certain stage in its cycle, creates a general tension on the surface of the Earth, as a result of which men in the ordinary state of being have no choice but to fight. This does not mean that the influence itself implies war, any more than turning on an electric current implies that light-bulbs shall fuse. If men enjoyed a different level of being, that is, if they could use a sudden increase in inner tension to

produce changes in themselves, instead of automatically relieving it against others, then the martial cycle would have quite a different significance."

Here is a quotation from the Mahabharata: "No person in this world... can support life without injuring other creatures. The very ascetic leading a solitary life in the depths of the forest is no exception. The irresistible course of time affects all mortals. All earthly things, ripened by time, suffer destruction. Some, O king, slay some men. The slayers, again, are slain by others. This is the language of the world. In reality, however, no one slays and no one is slain. Some one thinks men slay (their fellow men). Another thinks men do not slay. The truth is that the birth and destruction of all creatures have been ordained to happen in consequence of their very nature."

Can you read the Ramayana without judging, without condemn- ing or without condoning? All division creates and feeds violence. Yes and No are equally violent. "Is that so" is the only non- violence. As you are reading this, look within yourself; you agree with some statements and you disagree with others -- that is violence. If you can observe this whole phenomenon, that intelligence observing this total phenomenon is beyond violence.

Will violence ever completely disappear from the earth?" is a popular question! The question is violence and the answer is violence, too, since they divide mankind into those who answer Yes and those who say No.

Study the Ramayana without all this; and then you will be able to assimilate it. And, the Ramayana itself will act, and such action, being free from self-interest and self-will will be non- violent. Enthrone Rama in your own heart, without judging him (either as God or otherwise); and then Rama himself will act from within you. This, I feel is the only way to study this text. May God bless you.

SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

PRAYER BEFORE THE DAILY READING

1. kujantaṁ rama rameti madhuram madhuraksaram aruhya kavitasakham vande valmikikokilam

2. valmikermunisimhasya kavitavanacarinah Senvan ramakathanadan ko na yati parin gatin

3. yab piban satatan ramacaritanṛtasagaran atpptastam munin vande pracetasama kalmasan

4. gospadikṛtavarasi masakikretaraksasam ranayaganahamalaratnam vande'nilatmajam

5. anjananandanañ vTrañ janak15okansanan kapsamaksahantaran vande lank bhayaṅkaraṅ

6. manojavan marutatulyavegan jitendriyam buddhimatah varisṭham

vatatmajam vanarayuthamukhyam Sriramadutam širasa namami

7. ullanghya sindhoh salilam salilan yah Sokavahnin

janakatmajayab

adaya tenaiva dadaha lankam namami tam prañjaliranjaneyam

8. anjaneyamatipatalananam kancanadrikamaniyavigrahan

parijatatarumülavasinam bhavayami pavamananandanam

9. yatra yatra raghunatha kirtanam tatra tatra kṛtamastakañjalim

baspavariparipürpalocanan marutin namata raksasantakan

10. vedavedye pare pumsi jate dašarathatmaje

vedab prácetasadas1t saksatramayanatmanah

11. Sriraghavam dasarathatnajama praneyan sitapatin

raghukulInvayaratnadipan

ajanubahumaravindadalayatakşam ramaṁ

nisacaravinašakaraṁ namami

12. vaidehisahitam suradrumatale haime mahamandape madhyepuspakamasane magimaye virasane susthitan

agre vacayati prabhanjanasute tattvaṅ munibhyah paran vyakhyantam bharatadibhit parivṛtan raman bhaje Syamalah

(Free translation)

1. I salute sage Valmiki (the nightingale) who sings in sweet voice the sweet name of Rama, Rama, from the 'tree' of poesy.

2. He who hears the roar (the story of Rama) of the lion (Valmiki, the sage) who roams the forest (of poetry) attains the supreme state.

3. I salute the sage (the pure Valmiki) who is not satiated even after constantly drinking the nectarine story of Rama. 4. I salute Hanuman who is the crest jewel of Ramayana, who crossed the ocean as if it were the footprint of a calf, and who treated the demons as if they were mosquitoes. 5. I salute Hanuman the darling of Anjana (his mother), who put an end to the sorrow of Sita, who killed the demon Aksha and who was terror to the demons of Lanka.

6. I salute with bowed head Hanuman who was the messenger of Lord Rama, who could move as fast as the mind or the wind, who was self-controlled and was the foremost among the wise, who was the son of the wind-God and the foremost among the vanaras.

7. I salute Hanuman who crossed the ocean playfully, who gathered the fire of sorrow that tormented Sita and with it burnt Lanka.

8. I contemplate Hanuman with wide forehead and golden complexion, who dwells at the root of the celestial tree. 9. Adore Hanuman the destroyer of the demons who is present with tears of devotion in his eyes wherever the names of Lord Rama are sung.

10. When the Supreme Being (the goal of the Vedas) incarnated as Rama, the vedas became Ramayana.

11. I salute Rama the son of Dasaratha, who is peerless, who is the husband of Sita and the light of the race of Raghu, who has long arms and lotus eyes."

12. I adore Rama who is seated at the foot of the celestial tree on a flowery seat in a golden palace, along with Sita and his brothers, while his glories are sung by the sages.

VALMIKI'S

RAMAYANA

BALA KANDAM

1st JANUARY

Boyhood of Rama

ko nvasmin sampratam loke gunavan kas ca viryavan

dharmajñas ca ketajñas ca satya vakyo drdha vratah (1.2)

VALMIKI asked the foremost among sages, Narada: "Who is there in this world who is of good nature, powerful, righteous. alert in action, truthful in speech, firm in resolve, exemplary In conduct, devoted to the welfare of all beings, learned, skilful, with a pleasant presence, self-controlled, with anger over- come, resplendent and free from jealousy, of whom even the gods are afraid when he is angered?"

Delighted, the sage Narada narrated in brief the whole of the Ramayana, after extolling the glories of lord Rama who was the one person that matched the description implied in Valmikis question. "Rama is the peer of lord Visnu! And in his nature he is like the ocean, the Himalayas, mother earth, the god of wealth and dharma himself." Narada recounted the story of Rama.

After the narration, Narada went his way. Valmiki, ac- companied by his disciple Bharadvaja, went towards the Tamasa River for his noon bath and ablutions. Just then he saw a hunter mercilessly kill a male crane while it was sporting with its female companion, and heard the female's heart-rending cry. Overcome by pity and angered by the hunter's heartless cruelty, Valmiki uttered a curse; "For this sin, you will lose your peace of mind for countless years." Regaining his composure at once. Valmiki regretted the curse (which had taken the form of a verse couched in delightful metre) and countermanded the curse saying: It shall be a verse and not a curse." Yet, the mystery that even he could lose his temper and thus risk losing the merit of his asceticism intrigued him.

Thus musing, he returned to his hermitage. There he beheld the divine Brahma, the creator. Valmiki worshipped the creator. Divining the ascetic's mental state, Brahma said: "The metre in which you uttered those words, O Valmiki, will bring you great blessings. In the same metre sing the glory and the story of Sri Rama; elaborate on what Narada has already told you. All the details concerning the story of Rama will be revealed to your vision; nothing that is expressed by you will prove to be false. Your composition will be sung by people so long as the sun and the moon shine."

After thus blessing him, Lord Brahma departed for his own realm. Immediately thereupon, Valmiki began the immortal epic, the Ramayana, in the same style in which he had uttered his first verse which was directed to the hunter.

tatah pasyati dharmatma tat sarvam yogam asthitab

pura yat tatra nirvṛttan panav amalakam yatha (3.6)

Valmiki entered into deep meditation and in his superconscious state he actually saw all that took place in the past, as clearly as he would see a Truit lying on his palm. The en- Tire story unfolded Itself in his consciousness. In all its details, even as to what the characters in the story said or thought,

and how they laughed or behaved. And, the narration flowed from his lips in the form of an exquisite poem, and though its central theme is the detailed exposition of dharma and moksa (liberation), it also deals with prosperity (artha) and pleasure (kama), and it delights the mind as much as it en1ightens the soul. The story that thus unfolded covered from the birth of Rama to his coronation and his later reign as the monarch. It consisted of twenty-four thousand verses.

Valmiki wondered: "Who is that intelligent man endowed with almost superhuman memory who will commit the whole poem to his memory and pass it on to posterity? At that instant, Kusa and Lava entered his presence and bowed to him. They were the sons of Rama and Sita, born in Valmiki's own hermitage, after Sita had been banished from Rama's court and had taken the asylum of Valmiki's hermitage. Kusa and Lava were his own pupils, and foremost among them. Unto them Valmiki committed the epic poem, the entire Ramayana which embodies the great story of Sita, calling it Paulastya Vadham as it deals with the con- quest of Ravana or Paulastya.

The two boys quickly memorised the entire epic. They were endowed with melodious voices; and they were masters of music. In appearance they naturally were the very images of Sri Rama. One day they recited the epic in an assembly of sages and saints, who were all enchanted by the music and transported by the sublimity of the epic itself. They exclaimed that Valmiki's portraiture of the story of Rama kept it alive for all time, and that it was so vivid that to listen to it was to see it all over again. They rewarded the two boys with suitable presents.

Thus encouraged, the two boys travelled, narrating the divine story wherever they went. They reached Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala over which Sri Rama ruled. Here, too, they were warmly received by the people. Their fame reached Rama's ears. He invited them to his palace, received them with due honour (the honour due to ascetics and sages) and seated them in his court. He then said to his brothers: "Listen carefully to the epic poem that these two young boys are going to sing."

Thereupon, the two boys began to sing the story, as commanded by Sri Rama, in a style befitting the dignity of the poem: Rama himself was in the audience and soon his mind was absorbed in the narrative.

citram aṣṭa 'padakaram vara nariganair yutam

sarva ratna samakirnam vimana gṛha Sobhitam (5.16)

KUSA and LAVA said:

The sublime story that we are about to narrate is of the descendants of the grest king Iksvaku among whose ancestors was the famous Sagara. It is known as the Ramayana. Listen without prejudice, as we relate the story from the very beginning.

There is a mighty kingdom known as the Kosala on the bank of the holy river Sarayu. Its capital is Ayodhya, a city which was built by the Vaivasvata Manu himself, the first ruler of the earth during the present world-cycle. This vast city is twelve yojanas (over ninety-six miles) long and three yojanas (over twenty-four miles) wide. It is a powerful and prosperous city. The city is well planned and laid out, sur- rounded by an impassable moat. In it are embassies of kings who pay tribute to the emperor; and in it are traders from many countries of the world. Its roads are clean and wide: and its faultless water-supply system provides good and sweet water for all its inhabitants. It has seven-storeyed buildings decorated with precious stones and it is resplendent like a celestial body. It is protected on all sides by mighty and Faithful warriors who make it utterly invulnerable.

In that foremost among cities, the citizens are happy. devoted to righteousness, learned and wise, truthful, contented with the wealth they have and therefore free from avarice. No one in that city is poor or destitute. No one is ignorant or cruel. Everyone leads a well-regulated life of piety and charity. Everyone has faith in God and the scriptures; and every member of the twice-born communities is well versed in the sacred lore. Narrow-mindedness and pettiness are unknown in that city. The brahmanas are zealously devoted to the study of the sacred texts, to a self-controlled life free from desire and hate and to the promotion of righteousness in the world. And, the members of the other three communities (the rulers and warriors, the farmers and businessmen, and the servants of the people) follow the leadership of the brahmanas.

It was over such a kingdom and in such a city that the famous king Dasaratha ruled. He was himself learned in the Vedas. He was as mighty as he was wise. He was in truth a royal sage, a sage who happened to occupy a throne. He led an austere life, his mind and senses fully controlled. From Ayodhya the capital city (its name itself significant viz.. Invincible), made

impregnable by its strong gates, made re- splendent by its lovely houses and inhabited by thousands of people, the lord of the world, Dasaratha, governed the kingdom as Indra rules the heaven.

videšesv api vijñatah sarvato buddhi niscayah

guror guna grhitas ca prakhyatas ca parakramaih (7.17)

The king Dasaratha had eight ministers. Vasistha and Vama- deva were his preceptors. He also had other counsellors.

The ministers were endowed with noble qualities of states- manship. They were affluent and modest, powerful and self- restrained, majestic and truthful. They were courteous in their manners and a smile always played upon their lips. They were strict but never lost their temper even when provoked. They were tactful, but they did not swerve from the path of truth. They were just: they did not hesitate to punish the guilty even if the latter were their own sons, and they did not persecute even an enemy who was not found guilty. They ensured that the state coffers were full, but did not resort to unrighteous means to achieve this end. While meting out punishment. they invariably took into consideration the weak-ness or the strength of the guilty. Their conduct earned the approval of the preceptors. They were famous and powerful, and their reputation for statesmanship and wisdom travelled even to foreign lands.

Though the king was so righteous and though he was eager to have a son and heir to the throne, he was not blessed with a son. One day the king said to himself: "Why should I not per- form the horse-rite in order to earn the blessing of a son?" He had his preceptors and priests immediately invited to his court.

The king said: "Though I enjoy all the blessings in this world, yet I do not have the blessing of looking at the face of a son and this makes me sad. In order to earn that blessing, I consider that I should perform the horse-rite. May you be pleased to make this possible!" The preceptors applauded this idea. They advised that a good horse be released and its safety ensured. They asked for the ground on the northern bank of the river Sarayu to be got ready for the sacred ritual.

The king thereupon decreed that all this should be done forthwith. He entrusted the care of the horse to a noble prince. He ensured that the

preliminary rites connected with the horse-rite be duly performed by the priests so that there might be no flaw in its conclusion, as otherwise, the performer of the rite would forfeit his prosperity. The ministers and the priests got busy immediately with their allotted tasks.

The king then announced his intention to his wives: "Under go the necessary consecration along with me," said the king. And when they heard this, their faces blossomed like lotuses at the end of the winter season.

tatra ca niyamane tu vipre tasmin mahatmani

vavarṣa sahasa devo jagat prahladayans tada (10.29)

Minister Sumantra said to the king:

The following story was originally attributed to Sanatkumara, who prophesied the birth of four sons to you. He further prophesied as follows:

The sage Kasyapa has a son known as Vibhandaka who will beget a son called Rsyasriga. This latter will constantly dwell in the forest, devoted to the service and the holy and only company of his father. And therefore Rsyasṛnga will observe brahmacarya in both its aspects: physical continence and also the spiritual transmutation of the whole being. Having never set his eyes on members of the opposite sex, he will possess the innocence of ignorance.

During the same period, a mighty king called Romapada will be the ruler of Anga. And, the kingdom will suffer from a severe drought as the fruit of the karma of the king and his subjects. The king will seek the counsel of the learned brahmanas who will proffer the only solution to the crisis: "If you will bring the young sage Rsyasrnga to your kingdom and give him Santa, your adopted daughter, in marriage, the gods will be pleased and send abundant rain."

But who could lure the mighty sage away from his father? The king will entrust the task to the brahmanas. The family priest will suggest to the king: "Let the best among your courtesans be employed to achieve the royal purpose." The king will consent. A bevy of the most beautiful young women will go to the forest where the sage will live. By the will of benign providence, Rsyasraga too, will happen to notice their presence outside the hermitage. He will invite them to the hermitage where he will duly worship them as guests should be worshipped. They, in their turn will give him some

fruits and take leave of him, for fear of incurring the displeasure of his father.

Their touch, their fond embrace and their company will arouse in the young innocent a desire for their further company. Very soon he will leave the hermitage and trail after the courtesans. Lo and behold, as he enters the kingdom of Anga, there will be the most welcome shower of rain.

The king will receive the young ascetic with due honours and immediately beg of him to confer a boon: "May your father be not angry with us nor curse us! And this will be granted. The king will lead the young sage into the inner apartments and there will give his adopted daughter Santa in marriage to the sage. The glorious sage Rsyasrhga will thus spend his time in the company of his wife Santa.

tad aham yasṭum icchami sastra drstena karmana rsi-putra-prabhavena kaman prapsyami ca 'py aham (12.10)

Minister Sumantra continued:

The sage Sanatkumara further prophesied as follows: "A descendant of Iksvaku, king Dasaratha by name, will cultivate the friendship of king Romapada. The former will one day approach the latter with the request: 'I have no sons O king. Therefore, please let Rsyasriga be asked to conduct a sacred rite so that I may be blessed with a son. In response to this request, Romapada will depute the sage to conduct the sacred rite through which Dasaratha will be blessed with sons. I pray that the needful may speedily be done to persuade the sage Rsyasraga to come here and preside over the sacred rite you have undertaken.

Forthwith, the king Dasaratha, with the permission of his preceptors and priests, sought the presence of the holy sage Rsyasṛnga. Having reached the forest hermitage, he met king Romapada in the company of the sage. Romapada received Dasaratha with great joy. delight and respect. After spend- ing a few days in the hermitage, king Dasaratha prayed to Romapada: "Let your daughter and her sage husband come to Ayodhya, to bless the sacred rite I am about to commence." Romapada conveyed this request to the blessed couple who immediately consented.

All of them left the hermitage. King Dasaratha despatch- ed fast messengers to Ayodhya to convey to the citizens the glad tidings of the sage's visit and

to ask them to give him a royal welcome. The delighted citizens celebrated the sage's entry into the capital with a festival. The sage and his wife enjoyed the royal hospitality for some days.

On the advent of spring, king Dasaratha approached Rsyasriga with the prayer that the sacred rite may be commenced. The sage issued the necessary instruction. The king summoned the preceptors and priests and said: "I wish to perform the horse-rite in order to obtain the blessing of a son. And, I am sure that by the spiritual power of Rsyarnga, I shall have my wish fulfilled," The priests and the preceptors applauded the king's words.

Rsyadrhga thereupon instructed as to the proper manner in which the sacred horse should be released and the ritual ground should be prepared. The king, on his part, requested the priests to ensure that the rite be conducted without the least flaw: for the least flaw in its conduct would have contrary results. And the priests responded suitably and got busy with the preparation for the sacred horse-rite. Having thus personally ensured the proper performance of the rite. the king Dasaratha retired to his own apartment.

avajñaya na datavyam kasyacil 1ilaya 'pi va

avajaya ketan hanyad dataram na 'tra samsayah (13.32)

A year had gone by: as enjoined by the scriptures, the king was ready to commence the horse-rite. Humbly he approached his preceptor Vasistha and said: "You are a dear friend to me, my supreme preceptor, too: you alone can bear the burden of the proper execution of this rite." The sage Vasistha immediately assumed charge.

At Vasistha's behest, a whole new township sprang up on the northern bank of the holy river Saray with ritual pits, palaces for royal guests, mansions for the officiating priests, stables for horses, elephants and so on, wells and markets, all of them properly equipped to supply the needs of the numerous guests expected to grace the occasion. Vasistha personally in- structed: "Every house should be well provided with food and other necessities. Ensure that the people of all the communit- ies are nicely fed and attended to, with respect never without respect and reverence. No one shall show the least disrespect or displeasure, leave alone anger, towards the guests." A11 those in charge humbly accepted the charge. Vasistha asked Su- mantra to invite the princely neighbours, the kings of neigh- bouring kingdoms as also

those afar, to attend the sacred rite. Very soon they began to arrive with rich presents for king Dasaratha. Everyone concerned reported back to Vasistha that the duty allotted to them had been accomplished. Once again, Vasistha warned them: "Serve and give all that is necessary to our guests, but give with respect; do not serve with disrespect or playfully; disrespectful service destroys the giver."

At the conclusion of the year of consecration, the sacred horse had also returned. With Rsyasriga at their head the priests now commenced the horse-rite, which proceeded in strict accordance with scriptural injunctions. In fact, the priests in their eagerness not to let a flaw creep in, exceeded even the scriptural demands in the performance of the rite. There was no flaw in the rite, the mantras were correctly recited and the ordained procedure was strictly adhered to. Vasistha had said: "Give, give food and clothes to all," and those in charge literally fulfilled this command. All the guests were thoroughly satisfied and blessed the king. The various beasts through whom the different deities were to be worshipped had been brought to the hall. The horse itself was richly deck- ed and worshipped by the queens. Delighted that the horse-rite had concluded without an obstacle, the king gave away the land to the priests who however, returned it to the king and accepted more useful monetary gifts from the king. They were all highly pleased.

The king fell at the feet of Rsyasriga and the sage reassured the king that his wish would be fulfilled.

tatra tvah manuṣo bhutva pravṛddham loka-kaptakam

avadhyam daivatair visno samare jahi ravanam (15.21)

The holy sage Rsyasrnga contemplated deeply for a few minutes and then said to king Dasaratha: "I shall perform a sacred rite prescribed in the Atharva Veda, adopting the method of the perfected heavenly beings, for the sake of securing the boon of progeny for you." As the sage commenced this sacred rite, the gods and the siddhas (demi-gods) descended upon the hall of worship in their ethereal forms. They worshipfully addressed Brahma the creator as follows: "Lord, relying on a boon you had conferred upon him, the demon Ravana is oppressing all of us. According to that boon he cannot be killed by gods, demi-gods and demons: and so we are powerless against him. Even the natural elements function in obedience to him. Pray, find some means of putting an end to our tormentor."

The creator was sorely distressed to hear this and replied: "Ravana, proud and haughty that he was, only prayed that the gods, demi-gods and demons should not kill him: he held man in such utter contempt that he did not include man in the list! Hence, he can only be killed by a human being." As Brahma said this, the lord Visnu descended upon the scene. The gods now turned to him in heartfelt prayer: "Lord, we lay the burden of our misery upon your shoulders. Pray, incarnate yourself as a human being and destroy this Ravana who is an enemy of the world; who is invincible by gods. AT1 of us - gods, demi-gods, demons, sages and hermits seek your refuge for protection: you are indeed the supreme refuge for us all. The lord Visṇu assured them that he would do the needful.

Lord Visnu quickly decided that he would become the son of Dasaratha, at the same time fulfilling the wish of the gods. The lord at once became invisible to them all.

At the same time, a divine being emerged from the sacred fire, holding in his hands a golden bowl containing payasam (a preparation of milk and rice). He said to king Dasaratha: "I am a messenger of Visou. With this sacred rite you have propitiated the lord. This payasam which has been prepared by the gods is capable of conferring the boon of progeny up- on you; take it and give it to your wives." Saying thus, that messenger disappeared into the sacred fire. King Dasaratha at once gave the payasam to his wives. Half of it he gave to Kausalya, half of what remained he gave to Sumitra, half of the rest to Kaikey, and what remained he gave again to Sumitra. Such indeed was the potency of this divine payasam that all of them instantly shone with the radiance appropriate to the presence of a divine being in their wombs.

tatas ca dvadaše mase caitre navamike tithau (18.8)

kausalya 'janayad ramam sarva laksana samyutam (18.10)

Brahma, the creator, commanded the gods: "Project part of your energies into the mortal world so that mighty beings may be born of you, in order to aid the Lord."

Thus commanded by the creator, the gods begot through vanara-women offspring mighty, powerful and strong and with the form and the external

appearance of their celestial parent. Hanuman, the offspring of the wind-god was the cleverest and the ablest of them all.

A year had rolled by. At the end of the twelfth month after quaffing the celestial payasam, on the ninth day of the lunar (bright) fortnight in the month of Caitra (April-May), Kausalya gave birth to the resplendent Rama, the Lord of the universe, adored by all, who was indeed the manifestation of one half of lord Visnu. After this, Kaikey gave birth to Bharata who was a quarter-manifestation of lord Viṣnu. Sumitra gave birth to twins Laksmana and Satrughna, who, together formed the other quarter of lord Visnu.

This was an occasion for great rejoicing not only in Ayodhya and in the kingdom of Kosala, but in the celestial realm, for the Lord incarnate as the son of man would put an end to the reign of terror of the demon Ravana. The citizens gave the fullest reins to their eagerness to celebrate the event.

The preceptor of the king, Vasistha, christened the four sons Rama, Laksmana, Bharata and Satrughna, and also lavished gifts upon all, on behalf of the king. Laksmana became an inseparable companion to Rama; they were one life in two bodies. And without Laksmana Rama would not even go to sleep. Even so, Bharata and Satrughna were dear to each other.

All of them grew up into intelligent and wise young men, learned in the scriptures, exemplary in their conduct and de- voted to the welfare of all. The king was supremely happy to see them thus grow into young men.

At this time, the sage Visvamitra came to Ayodhya. He sent word through the guards at the palace gate to the king Dasaratha of his desire to meet the king. Dasaratha ran for- ward to receive the holy sage who was a Rajarsi (because he was of royal descent) and had later become, by dint of great austerity, a brahmarsi (equal to a brahmana-sage). The king worshipped the sage who warmly embraced the holy men in the royal court. The king then offered to do whatever lay in his power to serve Visvamitra, and this offer greatly pleased Visvamitra.

aham vedmi mahatmanam ramaṁ satya-parakramam

vasisto 'pi maha-teja ye ce 'me tapasi sthitah (19.15)

Visvamitra was thrilled to hear the king's noble words, and he further fortified the king's noble intentions by saying: "There is no one in the world who is your equal, O foremost among kings! You have a glorious ancestry

and, in addi- tion, you have the sage Vasistha himself as your preceptor and spiritual guide." The sage continued: "I have undertaken the vows connected with the performance of a sacred rite which is being interfered with by a couple of demons. I could easily deal with them myself, but the vows prevent me from giving vent to my anger. Hence, I pray, send with me your son Rama for the protection of this sacred rite. In my care and with his own prowess he will be able to do the needful. I assure you that the two demons are as good as dead, for I know the matchless might of Rama, as even Vasistha and the other sages do. I need him only for ten days and nights, and it is imperative that the sacred rite be completed within that time and not be prolonged by interruptions."

When king Dasaratha heard this he promptly fainted, and regaining consciousness after a few minutes, he spoke falteringly to Visvamitra: "Rama is hardly sixteen years of age; I do not see that he is qualified to fight, especially with de- mons. Tell me what I should do. I shall send you my vast army. I shall myself come with you and fight the demons, but without Rama I cannot live even a few minutes. He is but a child and is incapable of assessing the strength of the enemies. After a long, long time I have been given this precious son as the gift of the gods; how can I even think of parting from him. Nay, I shall come with my army to fight the demons."

Visvamitra reiterated his demand in the following words: "There is a mighty demon called Ravana, a descendant of Pulastya. He himself does not personally interfere with sacred rites, but he sends two other demons, Marica and Subahu, to disturb them, and they throw filth, blood and flesh into the sacred fire. It is against such foes that I seek the help of Rama, for only he can restrain these demons."

Greatly disturbed in mind to hear this, the king replied: "Oh, no, even I cannot face the mighty Ravana in battle. But if it is only to deal with Marica and Subahu, I shall come with my army, but I can in no circumstances send my beloved son Rama. You are indeed a renowned sage and you know dharma: therefore kindly show mercy upon us. Do not ask that I send Rama with you. If you like, I shall come with you. If that is not acceptable to you, kindly forgive my inability to do anything in the matter."

pratijagraha te vidye maharser bhavitatmanah

vidya samudito ramah susubhe bhurivikramah (22.21)

In great anger, the sage Visvamitra said to king Dasaratha: "How disgraceful and how unworthy of a king, that having promised you go back on your own word! This is unworthy of the glorious clan you belong to. However, if that is your decision, I will go; enjoy the ignominious life!"

Seeing this, the sage Vasistha intervened and said to the king Dasaratha: "O king, you are descended from an unbroken line of the most righteous monarchs. It does not behove you to swerve from the path of truth. If you should break your promise to the sage Visvamitra, you would lose all the merit that you earned by the performance of the great religious rites. The sage Visvamitra is a pastmaster of the marshal arts. He has at his command all the most deadly missiles (astras) which he has acquired directly from lord Siva himself. Moreover, he can even invent new and more deadly missiles. It is not as if he is afraid of these demons. He can surely deal with them; but he is asking for Rama for the good of Rama himself! Therefore, do not hesitate to accede to Visvamitra's request; thus would you be fulfilling your own promise."

These words reassured the king who immediately regained his composure and self-confidence and made up his mind to send Rama with the sage to protect his rite. He sent for Rama, embraced him fondly, kissed the crown of his head and blessed him. The family preceptor Vasistha blessed Rama, too, with sacred Vedic texts. Even nature blessed Rama. As Rama and the inseparable Laksmana set out to follow the sage, there was a gentle breeze and a shower of flowers from above.

It was a sight for the gods to see -- Rama and Laksmana with warlike weapons slung on their shoulders walking with the stern ascetic Visvamitra. While they were still walking along the southern bank of the holy river Sarayu, the sage addressed them: "Rama, without the least loss of time I shall initiate you into mysteries of Bala and Atibala (strength and supreme strength); when you acquire these, you will not be subjected to fatigue, to fever, nor will your lovely form undergo adverse change. Nor will the demons be able to overpower you even in your sleep, if you have these mysteries."

After the necessary preliminary purification, Rama received the divine mysteries from the sage; and immediately he shone with a new brilliance. The three spent that night on the bank of the holy river Sarayu, and Rama

and Laksmana rendered the sage all the personal service that a disciple is expected to render the preceptor.

asarirah ketah kamah krodhad devešvarena ha

ananga iti vikhyatas tada prabhṛti raghava (23.14)

At dawn the next day, the sage lovingly awakened the princes and all three of them offered their morning prayers. The two princes devoutly saluted the preceptor, ready to do his bidding. Led by him, they continued their journey and soon reached the confluence of Sarayu and the holy Ganga, where they beheld several hermitages. The princes were curious and the sage said to them: "Cupid was endowed with physical form in days of yore. Lord Siva was once engaged in breath- taking austerities on this very spot: and Cupid sought to distract the Lord. By a mere hum-sound, and with the fire that emanated from his eye, the Lord destroyed the body of Cupid who thenceforward became bodiless. Where the limbs (anga) of his body were shed became known as Anga-territory. These hermits who are devoted to their austerities here are the followers of lord Siva."

While fording the holy river near the confluence, Rama heard a roaring sound in the water. Visvamitra allayed his curiosity again with the following story: "Near Mount Kailasa there is a lake known as Manasa Sarovar, because it was born of the mind of Brahma. This river Saraya is so called because it flows from that Sarovar. The sound you heard is caused by the force with which that river rushes to meet the holy Ganga. Offer your salutations to the holy rivers at the confluence, O Rama."

Soon they reached a terrible forest which was frightful to enter. Once again, Visvamitra explained: "This area was once a prosperous country. In days of yore when Indra slew the demon Vṛtra who was a brahmana by birth, he had to expiate the sin of having killed a brahmana. The holy sages and brahmanas performed the ritual of atonement with the waters of the holy rivers. When the impurities had thus been washed away, Indra shone with his native radiance. The impurities thus washed away from Indra were deposited here. Indra was happy to be rid of them and wanted to show his gratitude to the place where they fell away. He blessed this country with prosperity and named it Malada and Karuşa.

"The principalities of Malada and Karuşa were thenceforth prosperous and wealthy, till Tataka appeared on the scene. This demoness was the wife of the demon Sunda, and they have a terrible son known as Marica. Tataka strikes terror in the hearts of the inhabitants of Malada and Karuşa and has turned the prosperous and fertile country into a waste and a forest. Rama, now it is for you to get rid of this demonfacal family and to restore to this countryside the prosperity and the glory that it once had."

nrsamsam anrsamsam vi praja raksana karapat

pavanam va sadosam vi kartavyam raksata sata (25.18)

Rama was bewildered: "How could a frail woman possess such might and such strength?" And, the sage Visvamitra told him the whole story of Tataka which is as follows:

"Once upon a time there lived a powerful demi-god named Suketu. He had no children. Desirous of having an offspring he engaged himself in austerities. Brahma, the creator, was highly pleased with this and conferred the boon of a daughter upon him, at the same time blessing this daughter with the strength of a thousand elephants. It is just as well that the creator did not bless Suketu with a male child! The girl was as beautiful as she was strong. Suketu gave her in marri- age to a demon, Sunda. Of them the terrible Marica was born. "Sunda had been cursed to death by the sage Agastya. Taṭaka wished to avenge her husband's death and rushed at the sage. Agastya pronounced a curse upon Tataka also: 'From now you will lose the appearance of a demi-goddess and you will roam about as a terrible demoness.'"

"Do not let the thought that she is a woman deter you. For the welfare of society you have to destroy her. Praise- worthy and non-praiseworthy actions may have to be done by a ruler for the protection of his subjects -- even what appear to be unrighteous and sinful actions. This is indeed the eternal duty of those entrusted with the onerous task of administering the state. Therefore, destroy this wicked woman: she does not know what dharma means!"

Rama at once responded; "My father commanded me to obey you in all respects when he entrusted me to your care. By obeying you, therefore, I shall have fulfilled my duty towards you as well as my duty to my father!"

Saying this, he readied his weapon; and the sound that it produced terrified the dwellers of the forest and aroused the sus- picions of Tataka. She rushed towards the source of that sound and when she came into view, Rama jokingly pointed out that terrible form to Laksmana. "Look at this demoness, O Laksmana. We shall make her immobile by amputating her arms and legs: I do not feel inclined to kill this woman." Visva- mitra roared "hum" and spurred the princes on. She showered huge rocks upon Rama. Rama replied with missiles from his weapons. She disappeared from view. Visvamitra now warned Rama: "Do not dally with this demoness any more, Rama. They grow more powerful at nightfall. Kill her quickly." Though she remained invisible Rama hit her, guided by sound alone. She fell down dead.

At that very instant the forest shone with its old splendour.

visnu cakram tatha 'ty ugram aindram astram tathai 'va ca (27.5) dadami te mahabaho brahmam astram anuttamam (27.7)

Early in the morning of the subsequent day, the sage Vis- vamitra lovingly spoke to Rama: "I am delighted with you, Rama. I shall therefore give you an armamentarium of the most power- ful missiles with the help of which you will be able to subdue all your enemies whether they are earthlings or celestials. Here, take charge of the following foremost among the missiles:

"Dharma cakram (cakram may mean a revolver!), Kala cakram, Visnu cakram as also the fierce cakram of Indra. I give you the Danda cakram, as also the missile that has the power of the thunderbolt (Vajra), the Sulam (of Siva), the Brahma-Siras and another known as aisikam which is like a blade of grass. I give you the most powerful Brahma astram, the all-destroyer, and al- so mace-Tike missiles. And, here is the missile of the gand- harvas which confuses and stupifies the enemy. These other missiles are capable of putting the enemy to sleep and changing his mood from one of anger to one of peace. I also give you other missiles which can produce a shower of rain or dry up the earth, or generate unbearable heat and scorch the enemy. Also, another missile which produces in the enemy a sort of intoxica- tion and another which will rouse his passion. This missile here has the lustre of a sun and will bedazzle the enemy. I give you all these and many more which are powerful and valu- able in war with even celestials."

Rama saw all these missiles in front of him. Pleased, he resolved that he would use them only when such use was called for. Saluting the sage

Visvamitra, Rama submitted: "Sir, please also instruct me in the art of countering the effect of these missiles". The sage then instructed Rama and also Laksmana in the anti-missile system. In this connection, again, the sage gave them many more missiles with names that signify the way in which they function -- some which can be seen, others which cannot be seen, some with a forward motion and others with reverse motion, some with ten 'heads', others with a hundred 'bellies', some giving the appearance of burning coal, others appearing like dense smoke. All these missiles and anti-missile missiles were spread out in front of Rama, awaiting his command; they lay at his feet, as it were, offering their services to him. And, he made a mental note of them and resolved to use them when their use became absolutely necessary.

They had by now reached the verge of the dense forest. Just outside this they saw a beautiful and holy hermitage. Rama queried about this and sage Visvamitra narrated the following story concerning the Siddhasrama.

adya gacchamahe rama siddhasramam anuttamam

tad asramapadam tata tava 'py etad yatha mama (29.24)

The sage Visvamitra said: "In days of yore, Visnu himself dwelt here for thousands of years, practising austerities. Lord Vamana's hermitage, known as Siddhasrama, is also here. The following happened during the period king Bali ruled the earth and the heaven. Indra and the gods appealed to lord Visou for help. The demon king Bali performed a mighty rite, at the conclusion of which he would become Indra. Also, at the same time, the sage Kasyapa had successfully concluded a sacred observance over a period of a thousand years. When the Lord appeared be- fore him and offered to grant him a boon, the sage prayed: 'If, pleased with me, you are willing to grant a boon, then I pray to thee, become my son!' The Lord gladly incarnated as the son of the sage and his wife AditT. He was dwarfish in appearance. He immediately went over to Bali's house of worship and begged of the king to give him three paces of land. When this was granted, the Lord measured the heaven and the earth with two paces (and thus recovered them for Indra) and with the third he blessed the king by placing his foot on his head. This asrama (hermitage) which is so called because it removes srama (physical and mental fatigue) was indwelt by the Lord himself and I, being his devotee, dwell in it now. Come, let us enter the hermitage, for it is yours as

well as mine. I shall now commence the sacred rite and I pray, guard it from the demons' interference."

The princes, too, joyously replied: "Blessed sir, please commence the sacred rite, and we shall abide by thy command." The next morning the rite commenced. The sage Visvamitra him- self had taken on a vow of silence. Hence, the others instructed Rama and Laksmana: "Guard the house of prayer for six days and nights." And so they did, without a wink of sleep, vigilant throughout the day and night.

It was the last night. The ritual fire blazed with un- usual brilliance. There was a loud roar in the sky. Like mon- soon clouds, dark and turbulent, the two demons appeared in the sky. There was a shower of blood and flesh and all sorts of terrible things. "Laksmana, see how I scatter them in all directions," said Rama and fired the missile known as Sitesu (the cold missile) which hurled the demon Marica into mid-ocean, a distance of eight hundred miles, as wind disperses clouds. Marica was not killed. Then with a fire-missile Rama destroyed the other demon Subahu. Lastly, with the wind-missile, Rama dispersed the lesser demons. The rite proceeded to conclusion without any obstacles.

imau svo munišardula kimkarau samupasthitau

ajñapaya yathesṭam vai šasanam karavava kim (31.4)

Their mission accomplished, the princes slept in the hermitage and woke up betimes the next morning; and after concluding their morning prayers, they approached the sage Visvamitra with joined palms, and submitted: "We are your humble servants, O Sage; command us, what shall we do?" The sage Visvamitra Blessed them and replied: "King Janaka of Mithila is about to perform a sacred rite and I would like you to attend it along with me. In Mithila you will also see an extraordinary weapon which has baffled mighty men, gods and demons. It was actually a gift of the gods a long time ago; and since no one has so far been able to handle it, it has been worshipfully put away."

The sage at once got ready to move on. He bowed to the forest and sought permission of the trees: "God bless you, and I am now going from here to the Himalayas." Many sages, beasts and birds also accompanied Visvamitra! After a while, however, the sage persuaded the sages and the

birds and beasts to return to the forest. The hermits accompanying Visvamitra covered some distance before they retired for the night on the bank of the river Sone.

Visvamitra said: "Once upon a time there was a king known as Kuša who was a son of Brahma, the creator. He had four sons Kusamba, Kušanabha, Asürtarajasa and Vasu. Unto them he entrust- ed the task of protecting the people of the kingdom. The four sons built four cities, Kausambi, Mahodaya (Kanauj), Dharmaranya and Girivraja (Rajgir) respectively. These cities were sur- rounded by hills. The river Sone weaving through those hills was also known as Magadhi because it flows through Magadha territory.

"Kušanabha had a hundred daughters born through a celestial nymph Ghrtaci. When they had grown up into beautiful young women, the wind-god approached all of them and said; I wish to marry all of you. Give up the idea that you are human beings and attain longevity. Youth is evanescent; especially among humans. Become forever young and immortal, by accepting my proposal. The girls were distressed to hear this. 'How can we accept you as our husband - you, who enter into all beings? Moreover, our father is our lord and master, nay our god; he alone shall be our husband unto whom our father gives us away. Offended by this rebuttal the wind-god entered into them all and caused deformity of their limbs (like arthritis).

"Thus they approached their father Kušanabha with tearful eyes. The distressed king and father questioned them, 'Tell me, pray, who is the cause of this dreadful deformity of your lovely forms?"

alankaro hi nariṇam kşama tu purusasya va

kşama danam ksama satyam kşama yajñasca putrikah

kşama yasah kşama dharmah kşamaya visthitam jagat (33.7-9)

"The girls narrated all that happened, to their father. The king Kušanabha greatly applauded the conduct of his daughters and said: 'Forbearance is indeed the greatest ornament of women as also of men -- the kind of forbearance that you have shown in your conduct towards the wind-god. Forbearance is the greatest gift, the truth, the best form of worship, glory, piety and the support of the world.

"Soon, the king began to think of giving them away in marriage to a suitable man.

"It was about the same time that there lived a great ascetic by name ChO1T, who had undertaken unprecedented auster- ities. During this period, he was waited upon and served by a girl named Somada. The ascetic, highly pleased with her devot- ed service, said to her: 'I am highly pleased with your service; name a boon. At once she replied: I am unmarried, and I will not marry. Grant me, therefore, the boon of a son through the power of your asceticism. Highly pleased with this prayer, the ascetic willed that she should conceive and give birth to a son: and the cosmic (Brahmic) energy brought this about. The son thus conceived and delivered came to be known as Brahma- datta (gift of Brahma), who became the king of Kampilya. It was to this Brahmadatta that the king Kušanabha gave away all his hundred daughters in marriage. During the ceremony, when Brahmadatta touched the hand of each girl, her deformity left her and she regained her beauty and charm.

"The king Kušanabha now prayed for the birth of a son to him. His father Kuša blessed him saying: 'A pious son will surely be born to you,' and immediately ascended to heaven. Soon Kusanabha was blessed with a son whom he christened Gadhi, in accordance with the wishes of his noble father. That Gadhi is my father, O Rama; and I am also called Kaušika because I am a descendant of Kusa.

"I also had an elder sister known as Satyavati who had been given in marriage to the sage Reika. She was highly devoted to her husband. As a result, when the sage departed from this world, she ascended bodily to heaven, and later descended on earth as a river, the Kausiki (Kosi), out of the largeness of her heart. As such she continues to be to this day, O Rama. I was very fond of my sister and so spent some time on the bank of Kosi. After that, I left that spot and came to Siddhasrama where, thanks to you, I have now successfully completed the most sacred rite.

"Thus have I told you, Rama, the history of this place. The night is well advanced. It is time all of you retired to bed."

sai 'şa suranadi ramya Sailendrasya suta tada

suralokam samarudha vipapa jalavahini (35.23)

Early in the morning, the sage again heralded the dawn and urged the princes to get up and get ready to move on. Crossing the river Sone, the party marched onwards. They saw the holy river Ganga.

As usual, Rama posed a question, for the benefit of the whole assembly: this time he wanted to know the story of the Ganga. The sage Visvamitra said:

"Himavan (Himalayas) married the daughter of Meru (the pol- ar ice-cap) who was known as Mena. They had two daughters: the elder is Ganga and the younger is Uma. For the welfare of all the beings of the three worlds (heaven, earth and the interven- ing space) the gods begged Himavan to give Ganga to them. The magnanimous Himavan, too, acceded to their request. Thus, the holy Ganga ascended to heaven and became a celestial river; Tater she descended on earth in the form of a purifying stream. The other daughter Uma was given by Himavan in marriage to lord Siva himself."

With his curiosity whetted by this brief narration of the sublime story, Rama requested the sage to expand the narrative and give the account in greater detail. The sage, too, consented, and gave the following detailed account of the story of Uma, the consort of lord Siva, and also the story of the descent of the Ganga on earth:

"The lord Siva had married Uma, the daughter of Himavan. And, they were engaged in enjoying conjugal pleasures for a long period of time. The Lord's creative energy grew more and more intense; and even the gods were afraid that the earth would not be able to support his progeny. They therefore made bold to interrupt the union of the divine couple, to offer a prayer: 'Lord, pray restrain your creative energy by your own self-control; the worlds will not be able to bear the full im- pact of your creative energy. By such self-restraint practised by you and your consort, alone, will the worlds survive.

"The Lord at once agreed to the proposal. 'What shall we do with the energy already released?' he asked. This energy had covered the earth already. The gods sought the help of fire and wind. Fire concentrated the energy which now assumed the form of a mountain, and being blown around by the wind, it spread to a thicket of reeds and eventually assumed the shape of Kartikeya (lord Siva's son).

"Uma, the Lord's consort, however, was annoyed by the gods' interference in her union with the Lord and cursed the gods that they would never have an offspring."

kancanam dharanim praptam hiragyam atulaprabham

tamram karspayasam caiva taiksoyad evabhyajayata

malam tasyabhavat tatra trapu sisakam eva ca

tad etad dharanim prapya nana dhatur avardhata (19.20)

"While lord Siva and Uma returned to their austerities, the gods with Indra at their head approached Brahma, the creator, and humbly submitted: 'Lord, the divine being Siva had granted us our boon, which was to bless us with a commander: this commander can only be born of his energy. Having released this energy, lord Siva has resumed his austerities, along with Uma, his consort. Pray, consider what should be done.'

"The creator Brahma replied: 'Uma's words cannot be falsified. No god can receive lord Siva's energy to give it a body. Here is the heavenly (celestial) Ganga; let the god of fire convey the Lord's energy to Ganga who will then deliver the son. Ganga will doubtless regard the child to be hers; and Uma will also lavish her affections on him. Thus he will be the beloved of all.'

"The gods then approached the god of fire to accomplish the commands of the Creator. The god of fire in his turn approached the celestial Ganga and prayed that she should carry the Lord's creative energy. Ganga assumed a form of ethereal beauty. Seeing this the energy melted into her. The god of fire filled her with the divine energy.

"Unable to carry that divine energy for long, the holy Ganga, on the advice of the god of fire, released it on the side of the Himalayas. Where the energy flowed, everything turned into gold. Whatever the energy touched turned into gold and silver of incomparable brilliance; the mere heat of the energy turned objects at a distance into copper and iron. Even its impurities' became tin and Lead. Thus the minerals were created on earth.

"As I said before, the energy was spread among the reeds on the bank of the river Ganga. The gods gathered that energy. which became a boy. The gods ordained the deities presiding over the constellation Krttika to nurse the boy

with their milk; hence he came to be known as Kartikeya. He is known as Skanda because he 'flowed' with the river Ganga.

"In a matter of days this divine boy grew mighty in strength and destroyed the host of demons who were harassing the gods. He became the commander of the divine hosts.

"This is the story of the birth of lord Siva's son who is also known as Kumara. He who is devoted to Kartikeya will enjoy a long life, will be blessed with children and grand- children and will eventually become one with lord Skanda.

bhagavan prthivi sarva khanyate sagaratmajaih

bahavašca mahatmano vadhyante jalacarinah

ayam yajñaharosmakam anenasvopaniyate,

iti te sarvabhutani himsanti sagaratmajah (39.25-26)

Rama, I shall now tell you the story of the descent of Ganga on earth.

One of your own ancestors was the mighty king Sagara. He was without an heir to the throne, though he had two wives - Kesini, daughter of the king Vidarbha, and Sumati, daughter of the sage Aristanemi and sister of the divine bird Garuda. The king undertook austerities. Pleased with him, the sage Bhrgu bestowed upon the king a strange boon: "One of your wives will give birth to one son for the perpetuation of your clan; and the other will give birth to sixty thousand sons.""

In course of time, Kesini gave birth to a son christened Asamanja; and Sumati delivered an egg (of the shape of a gourd) from which sixty thousand sons emerged. Sumati preserved them in pots of ghee; they soon grew to be youthful boys. Asamañja true to his name proved to be a wicked boy who had dangerously sadistic tendencies and who revelled in torturing and drowning even young children. Yet, again, his own son Amŝuman was pious and noble and was greatly loved by the people.

King Sagara resolved to perform the sacred horse-rite. He chose the most holy piece of ground between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, which is regarded by sages as specially suited for the performance of holy rites, and commenced the rite. The sacred horse was entrusted to the care of the valiant Amsuman, the king's grandson.

Indra the chief of the gods, disguised as a ghost, however, stole the horse away at a critical point in the rite. The priests exclaimed: "O king, catch hold of the thief and kill him; let the rite proceed to a successful conclusion; otherwise great misfortune will result." The king sent for the sixty thousand sons and commanded them to comb the earth and find the horse; they had his permission even to dig the earth.

The sixty thousand fell to their task. Not finding the horse on earth, they began to dig the earth. Seeing this wanton and ruthless destruction of the subterranean and other life, the gods and demons prayed to Brahma, the creator: "Lord, life on earth is being destroyed by these sons of creatures and subterranean creatures Sagara. Aquatic are tormented, too. Suspecting that this or that may be the enemy of the horse-rite, and here or there the horse may be hidden, they are doing great harm to living beings.

taya klinnam idam bhasma gangaya loka kantaya

şasṭim putra sahasrani svarga lokaṁ nayişyati (41.20)

The creator, Brahma, replied: "Earth is, as it were, the consort of lord Visnu the protector of the universe. The sons of Sagara who thus ravage her and her creatures will surely meet their end at the hands of the Lord who himself dwells on earth at this time in the person of Kapila, the divine sage. The breaking up of the earth, too,does take place in every age: this is nothing unusual. And they who are endowed with vision see that those thoughtless people who are guilty of crimes against the good earth are justly punished." The thirty-three gods who preside over the natural elements returned to their abodes satisfied.

Sagara's sons could not find the horse, though they had searched everywhere and even dug up the earth. But the king urged them on: "Dig deep down, splitting the very earth into pieces." And so they did. As they went right through the earth, they encountered four elephants that looked like mountains (perhaps the other way round?) -- Virupaksa in the east, Maha-padma in the south, Saumanasa in the west, and Bhadra in the north. They paid their homage to each one of these and continu- ed their search. Finally they proceeded in the north-easterly direction. They were frustrated and angry. At the end of the tunnel through the earth, when they emerged into the open, they saw Kapila seated in meditation. They mistook the sage for the horse-thief: for they saw the sacred horse too, peacefully grazing near

the hermitage. They shouted in great anger and rushed at the sage. By mere utterance of 'hum' on the part of the sage Kapila of incomparable glory, all of them were reduced to ashes.

In the hall of worship, the king was impatiently waiting for the sons and the horse to return. When neither returned, he despatched his grandson Amisuman to find out what had happened. Amsuman took the same routes and met the same 'elephants' (and bowed to them) which reassured him that he would find the horse. Eventually reaching Kapila's hermitage, he saw the horse and the ashes of his uncles. While he was thinking of a suitable way in which to perform the obsequies to the departed, he saw the divine bird Garuda who advised him: "Grieve not,O brave one, the destruction of these your uncles by lord Kapila is just and as it should be. It is not right to use earthly water to propitiate their souls. When the divine Ganga is brought down on this earth, and when their ashes are touched by the waters of the Ganga, they will also ascend to heaven."

Amsuman returned to the house of worship and with the re- turn of the horse the king brought the rite to a conclusion. However,, he could not devise a method by which the celestial river Ganga could be brought down to the earth. Sagara ruled for a long time and passed away, without accomplishing his cherished ambition of having the ashes of his sons purified by the holy Ganga.

sapat prapatita ye ca gaganad vasudhatalam

kṛtva tatra 'bhisekam te babhuvur gata kalmasah (43.29)

On king Sagara's demise, the people lovingly elected Amšu- man to occupy the throne. He for his part, engaged himself in protracted austerities over a number of years, in order to bring the Ganga down: but he passed away before the austerities bore fruit. He had a son, Dilipa by name. After the death of AmSuman, Dilipa became king. But, he was so stricken with sor- row at the death of his granduncles, that he could not do any thing about it. On his death, his son Bhagiratha ascended the throne.

Bhagiratha repaired to Mount Gokarna (perhaps Gomukh) in the Himalayas to perform intense austerities with view to bring- ing Ganga down and also to gaining an offspring. He performed breath-taking austerities. Brahma, pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and granted him the boon of

his choice. And, Bhagiratha chose the two boons he had in mind. "Here is the Ganga," said lord Brahma, "but only lord Siva can withstand the impact of her descent upon earth."

Bhagiratha now turned his devotion to lord Siva. Standing on the tip of his toe for a full year, Bhagiratha invoked the grace of lord Siva. The Lord, pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and said: "I shall satisfy your noble wish and bear the Ganga on my head."

Soon, the celestial river Ganga descended in all her power and majesty on the head of lord Siva. The matted-locks of the Lord resembled the Himalayas themselves (perhaps the other way round?). Caught in the coils of the Lord's matted locks, the river tumbled down on her earthly course. The Lord let the river fall into the celestial lake Bindusara: Ganga emerged from here in three different directions, as seven streams. Bhagiratha rode in his chariot ahead of one of the streams or the main stream. The course of the river, like the course of our lives, was smooth in some places, tortuous in other places. Quiet here, tumultuous there, twisting and turning, running straight and even turning back. The waters of the Ganga, touched by the head of lord Siva himself, are extremely pure. Even they who, on account of a curse, have fallen from heaven are purified by bathing in the Ganga.

Bhagiratha thus Ted the Ganga on the earth. They passed near the house of worship of the sage Jahnu who was engaged in a sacred rite. The waters of the Ganga inundated the house of worship. Annoyed at this, the sage drank the entire river which thus disappeared within him. On the intercession of the gods and celestials, the sage allowed Ganga to emerge from his ear! Once again Ganga followed Bhagiratha's chariot. They eventually reached the tunnel made by the sons of Sagara. Bhagiratha reached the culmination of his superhuman efforts: the holy Ganga actually flowed over the ashes of Sagara's sons who were instantly purified and liberated.

idam akhyanam avyagro gangavatarapam Subham

yab srooti ca kakutstha sarvan kaman avapnuyat

sarve papab prapasyanti ayuh kirtisca vardhate (44.23)

The creator Brahma congratulated Bhagiratha on achieving the end of his quest, after overcoming all obstacles by super- human effort. He decreed that the holy river that Bhagiratha had thus brought on to the earth would

henceforth be known as Bhagirathi (the daughter of Bhagiratha.) He also decreed that whoever listens to this glorious account of Bhagiratha's unprecedented, Successful attempt superhuman, determined and to achieve the task set for himself (viz., bringing the Ganga down to earth) will have all his desires fulfilled, all his sins wiped out, and will enjoy fame and longevity.

Thus the sage Visvamitra concluded the story of Ganga. Early the next morning they crossed the Ganga and reached the city of Visala. Once again Rama asked Visvamitra to narrate the legends connected with Visala. The sage replied:

"During the epoch known as the Satya Yuga, there were two sisters, Diti and Aditi, who gave birth to many powerful children and many pious children respectively. They grew up. And the desire grew in them to be free from old age and illness, to become immortal. Looking at the ocean of milk (the Milky way) in the outer space, they felt that if they could find a suitable churning rod and rope, they could churn that ocean which would surely yield nectar that would confer immortality on them. They then used the Mount Mandara as the churning rod, the serpent Vasuki as the rope, and began to churn the ocean.

"But the first gift of the ocean was disappointing and distressing: a terrible poison Halahala emerged. The frightened gods sought the refuge of lord Siva, In order to save the gods and the whole of creation, lord Siva at once drank this terrible poison, as if it were nectar.

"The churning continued. The churning rod, Mount Mandara began to sink. The gods prayed to the lord Visnu who, assuming the form of a tortoise supported the mountain on his back. After a long time there appeared the divine physician, Dhan- vantari. Then came a bevy of celestial nymphs: as they were the very cream (rasa) of the ocean (ap), they were known as apsaras. Then there arose an intoxicating liquor known as Varunt. The demons refused to take it; but the gods took it. Therefore, the demons are known as asuras (they who did not take liquor or sura) and the gods are known as suras (they who drank the liquor sura). Then followed a divine horse, a divine gem, and lastly the nectar which all the gods and the demons sought and began to fight over. Lord Vishnu, assuming the dis- guise of a beautiful woman carried the nectar away. The demons who opposed the

Lord were defeated and the gods, with Indra as the leader, attained sovereignty!"

esa desah sa kakutstha mahendradhyuşitah pura

ditim yatra tapah siddham evam paricacara sah (47.11)

"Stricken with grief at the death of her sons (the demons) at the hands of her step-sons (the gods), Diti resolved to avenge their destruction. With tearful eyes she pleaded with her husband, the sage Kasyapa: 'Bless me, pray, that I may give birth to a son who will kill Indra, the chief among your sons through Aditi.' Caught on the horns of a dilemma, the sage cleverly worded his blessing: 'So be it: if you perform intense austerities for a thousand years, and if you are able to complete them without the least negligence, you will give birth to a son capable of killing Indra.

"Diti immediately embarked upon intense austerities. And, Indra (her step-son) himself served her, fetching firewood and water, fruits and other articles needed by her, and devoutly shampooing her feet while she slept. A thousand years passed. Highly pleased with Indra, Diti said: 'I am performing these austerities for the sake of a son to kill you! Yet, you have been devoutly serving me all these years. I am pleased with you. I shall, therefore, ensure that your new brother will be friendly with you, and that both of you will together conquer the world.

"Soon after this, at midday, she fell asleep. Unfortunately on that particular day, her sleeping posture was unethical and impure. She had her head between her feet. Indra was quick to take advantage of this impurity. He entered her body through his own magic power, and, with his powerful weapon (thunder- bolt) began to butcher the foetus, his unborn enemy. He had cut it into seven pieces, and they began to cry. He continued to cut them, telling them: 'Don't cry, don't cry. He had cut them again, each into seven pieces (forty-nine pieces in all). Diti woke up and wailed; 'Don't kill them, don't kill them. When Indra heard her wailing, he emerged from her body and prayed for forgiveness: 'You had committed an act of negligence and therefore forfeited the boon father gave you; hence I tried to destroy my unborn enemy. Kindly forgive me.'

"Though she was stricken with grief again at the loss, Diti realised that it was due to her own fault, and so forgave Indra. She said: 'These forty-nine

pieces will be born as the wind- gods, in groups of seven. You yourself had christened them Ma- rut (since you called out to them ma-ruda, don't cry). The seven groups of wind-gods will fill the heaven and earth and the intervening space, and move about under your direction. Thus Indra and his step-mother reached an understanding. This that sacred place, O Rama, where Diti performed her austerities and Indra himself served her."

yada cai tad vanam ghoram ramo dasaratha 'tmajah

agamisyati durdharsas tada puta bhavisyasi (48.31)

Visvamitra and the princes, accompanied by the other sages spent the night at Visala; the next morning they left for Mith-ila.

On the outskirts of Mithila, Rama saw an abandoned hermit- age and asked Visvamitra: "Pray, tell me whose hermitage was this which is without a hermit and looks desolate?"

With a delighted heart, the sage Visvamitra narrated the following story in reply: "This wonderful hermitage, O Rama be- longed to that foremost among sages Gautama in days of yore. He was living here with his faithful devoted and most beautiful wife Ahalya.

"One day, when the sage was absent from the hermitage, In- dra, the chief of gods, in the disguise of Gautama himself, entered the hermitage and sought union with Ahalya. The pious and devoted Ahalya knew instantly that the man in disguise was Indra himself; yet, she yielded to his advances, as she was high- ly gratified that the chief of gods had thus approached her. As Indra was leaving the hermitage, she warned him of Gautama's. wrath, and requested him to be careful; however, Gautama enter- ed the hermitage as Indra was leaving. In great anger, Gautama cursed Indra: Assuming my own form, you have committed a sin- ful act: you will, therefore, lose your virility'. Looking at his unfaithful wife, the sage cursed her, too: 'Living on air, lying on ashes, unseen by anyone, you will live here for a long long time; when, however, Rama will visit this hermitage, you will regain your purity. Having thus cursed both of them, the sage went away to the Himalayas.

"Having lost his virility, Indra pleaded with the gods and other celestials: 'In what I did, I only sought to serve the gods: I angered the sage Gautama, who cursed me with the loss of virility and by doing so lost the energy he had

gained by his austerities. Kindly do something by which my virility may be restored. The gods then approached the chief of the manes and prayed: 'Transfer the genitals of this ram to the loins of Indra; the castrated ram will be a delight to you, too. The chief of the manes acceded to the gods request and restored Indra's virility by transplanting the ram's genitals.

"Now that you are here, O Rama, the end of Ahalya's curse is near, too. Step into the hermitage." As Rama stepped into the hermitage, Ahalya came forward to greet them all. With all her impurities removed by the very sight of Rama, she shone with her ethereal beauty and splendour. She devoutly worshipped her divine guests. In the meantime, Gautama had also come there. Both of them offered their devotion and hospitality to Rama: and then resumed their austerities. Rama proceeded towards Mithila.

adya yajnaphalam praptam bhagavad darsanan maya

dhanyosmy anugrhitosmi yasya me munipungava

yajñopasadanam brahman praptosi munibhih saha (50.14)

Soon the party reached Janaka's hall of worship where the sacred rite was in progress. A new township had come into being. Rama admired the excellent arrangements made by Janaka. Thousands of brahmanas well versed in the Vedas had come from different parts of the country, and they had been comfortably lodged..

When Janaka heard of the arrival of the sage Visvamitra, he rushed forward to greet him. The sage, for his part, en- quired as to the king's welfare and the progress of the sac- red rite. He also greeted suitably the other sages in the hall of worship. King Janaka said: "It is now that my devot- ion and the sacred rite I am engaged in have become fruitful: by your presence. Blessed indeed am I, most fortunate am I today. He also informed the sage that the sacred rite would last twelve days; and the gods would themselves appear on the last day, to receive the offerings personally.

Looking at the princes, the king humbly asked Visvamitra: "Who are these young boys? They look like gods. Their gait is like that of elephants. These heroic boys are like a tiger and a bull in strength. Their eyes resemble the petals of a lotus. They are handsome like the Ašvini Kumaras (celestial physicians)." He also enquired as to the object of their tour and their visit to Mithila.

The sage Visvamitra explained to the king who Rama and Laksmana were and what they had accomplished thus far. Hear- ing of the account of their visit to Gautama's hermitage and the redemption of Ahalya, Satananda who was the family priest of king Janaka, and who was the son of Gautama and Ahalya, lovingly enquired as to the welfare of his parents. Visvamitra replied: "What needed to be done for both of them was done by us. Gautama and Ahalya have been re-united."

Delighted with this, Satananda then turned to Rama and said: "Welcome, O prince among men! It is indeed your great good fortune that you have come here, under the leadership of sage Visvamitra. This is a sage of incredible deeds, a brahmarsi, full of the power of austerity and spiritual rad- fance. I know him to be the best refuge. Listen, I shall now tell you all that I know about him:"

This sage was a great and noble king, devoted to right- eousness, who yet kept his enemies in check. He is the son of Gadhi, the grandson of Kusa. On one occasion, the king Visvamitra went round the world with a huge army. During this expedition, he came to the hermitage of sage Vasistha. This extraordinary hermitage was the abode of gods, celestials, as also flowers and wild animals. It was equal in splendour to Brahma's heaven!

yasya yasya yatha kamam ṣaḍrasesv abhipujitam

tat sarvam kamadhuk ksipram abhivarsa kṛte mama (52.22)

The sage Vasistha welcomed king Visvamitra and offered him the hospitality of the hermitage. The king, as was the custom, enquired if the religious activities of the hermitage were be- ing carried out properly: in reply, the sage informed the king that all was well with the hermitage and the hermits dwelling in it. For his part, Vasistha enquired of the king: "Is all well with you, O king? Are you protecting your people, strictly adhering to dharma? Are your royal servants dutiful? Are your enemies well under your control? Is everything well with your army, your treasury, with your friends and family?" And, the king Visvamitra too,replied that even so all was well.

The sage Vasistha continued: "May I offer you and your vast army the hospitality of the hermitage? Please accept it and be my guests today." The king was bewildered: what had this asce- tic and this hermitage to offer to the king and his vast army! Perhaps the offer was more of intention than

deed: taking it to be so, the king politely turned down the offer. The sage ob- viously knew the mind of the king and repeated the offer again and again. Finally, intrigued by the proceedings, the king ac- cepted the offer.

"Sabala", called out Vasistha, and a cow appeared before him. "I wish to entertain this king and his vast army today; kindly do the needful. Whatever type of food that each one of our guests may desire, make that available." Even so the cow did! Food of every description, drinks of every description, as desired by each one of the members of the king's army. together with necessary plates and cutlery in short, a royal banquet of unprecedented luxury and lavishness -- was spread before the king Visvamitra and his vast army.

The king was wonderstruck at this unheard-of miracle. After the meal, he approached the sage Vasistha and said: "I have a request to make. This cow Sabala is truly a gem among cows; and gems belong to the king. Therefore, give Sabala to me, and I shall give you a hundred thousand cows in return." Politely but firmly Vasistha turned down the offer and refused to part with Sabala. "All my religious activities, my sacred rites, depend upon her. I shall not part with her, even for a thous- and million cows!" The king would not relent: he offered a lot more! Thousands of elephants, horses, millions of cows, any quantity of jewels and gems... limitless wealth the king was ready to give to Vasistha; but he wanted Sabala. Equally adamant was the sage in turning down all the royal offers, again explaining that the cow was indispensable for his performance of the sacred rites and the daily charities, and finally clinch- ing the issue, by declaring: "What is the use of too many words: I shall not give Sabala."

ity uktva parama kruddho dandam udyamya satvarah

vidhumam iva kalagnim yama dandam iva 'param (55.28)

When Vasistha refused to part with the wish-yielding cow Sabala, king Visvamitra took her away by force. But very soon the cow wrestled with her captors and returned to Vasistha and wailed: "O sage, why have you abandoned me?" The sage lovingly replied: "Sabala, I have not abandoned you. But, the king has a vast army and therefore is more powerful than I am. What can I do now?" Quick was Šabala's rejoinder: "But it is said that in this world truly the mighty rulers are not powerful; it is the wise ones who are powerful; the power of the mighty is limited to their arms, whereas the

power of the wise ones is divine and infinitely superior. If it is your wish, I shall put an end to the king and his army." Vasistha, taking the hint, ordered Sabala: "Produce a mighty army to destroy the king's army."

Sabala at once created hundreds of warriors known as Pahlavas. When they were killed by the king's army, she prod- uced hundreds of others who were of mixed Saka-Yavana parent- age, and of fair and light complexion. They fought furiously with the king's army. The king used whatever missiles he had: by these the Yavanas, Kambojas and Barvaras (all of them for- eigners) were terribly harassed. Seeing this, Vasistha ordered Sabala to produce more warriors. From her mouth emerged Kambo- jas, from her udder Barvaras, from her hind parts Yavanas and Sakas, from the very pores of her skin Haritas, Kiratas and other foreigners. In no time, all these together destroyed the entire army of Visvamitra and even his sons.

One son had survived the carnage. Entrusting the kingdom to him, Visvamitra went to the Himalayas to pray, worship and to meditate. Pleased by his austerities, lord Siva appeared before him and granted a boon. Visvamitra prayed: "Whatever missiles are possessed by the gods, celestials and demons - I wish to know their secrets." Siva granted this prayer and con- veyed to him the vital secrets concerning the missiles. Armed with these, the king proudly assumed that the sage Vasistha could easily be defeated. Immediately he went to the hermitage of Vasistha and began sacking the holy abode with his missiles. A terrible fire raged in the hermitage; hermits began to run away out of fear, even though Vasistha tried to maintain their morale by asking them not to panic, and by promising to deal suitably with the king. Even birds and beasts fled the hermitage.

Greatly angered by this turn of events, the sage Vasistha said to king Visvamitra: "Cursed be thou: you have desecrated this holy hermitage, turning it into a desolate waste." The sage stood there with his staff uplifted -- the mendicant's staff look like Yama's rod of chastisement, like the smokeless Tire that portends cosmic dissolution.

dhig balam ksatriya balam brahma tejo balam balam

ekena brahma danḍena sarva 'strani hatani me (56.23)

The king's confidence in military hardware and might was not shaken by the mendicant's staff which the sage Vasistha flourished: "Hold on a minute,"

said Visvamitra and hurled the deadly fire-missile at the sage. "Here I stand," said Vasistha. "Do your worst, O vile warrior! Can a foolish warrior's might face the spiritual power of a knower of Brahman the infinite?" To Visvamitra's astonishment, the fire-missile was neutralised by Vasistha's staff!

One after another, Visvamitra used all the missiles whose secrets had been revealed to him by lord Siva the soporific missile, the intoxicating missile, missiles that are unbearably hot, a missile that dries up everything, a missile that tears things apart, a missile which like the thunderbolt shatters everything, and yet another missile, as deadly as death itself. The energy released by all these missiles was effortlessly ab- sorbed by the magic staff of the sage Vasistha!

Defeated in his purpose, Visvamitra now resolved to use the most powerful of all these missiles, the Brahma-astra, which could destroy every created object. Even the gods and the celestials watched this with great anxiety and bated breath. But, the staff held in the hand of the sage rendered even the Brahma- astra powerless. The impudence of the king, however, provoked the sage's ire: from every pore of the sage's skin, a super- normal energy emanated. Thereupon the gods and the celestials prayed to Vasistha: "Pray, arrest this flow of your divine energy." The sage calmed down. But, Visvamitra was utterly humiliated. "Shame on the might of a king; that is strength which a brahmana knower of the absolute) possesses. With just his staff, this sage neutralised all my deadly missiles! I shall engage myself in austerities: for by austerities does one gain brahmana-hood." So saying he proceeded southward and began his austerities.

After years of intense austerities, the creator Brahma him- self appeared before Visvamitra and said: "I recognise you as a royal sage." But, the king was not satisfied. He wanted to be a brahmana! He continued his austerities.

At the same time, there was a king known as Trišanku. He had a desire to ascend to heaven with his body! He approached Vasistha with the request: "I wish to bodily ascend to heaven. I shall perform a hundred sacred rites with this end in view. Please conduct them." Vasistha, however, refused to do so. Tris- anku was in no mood to give up his attempt. He, therefore, ap- proached Vasistha's sons to do him the favour of conducting the hundred sacred rites so that he could bodily ascend to heaven.

daivam eva param manye pauruṣam tu nirarthakam

daivena 'kramyate sarvam daivam hi parama gatih (58.23)

Greatly annoyed by Trisanku's request, sage Vasistha's sons replied: "The holy guru Vasistha is devoted to truth: and he has turned down your proposal how then do you resort to others with the same proposal? If he has said it cannot be or should not be done, it should be abandoned! To do what has been forbidden by him would be insulting him." But, proud and greedy king Trisanku, though he was a pious and noble ruler, would not give up his pursuit! He said to the sons of Vasistha: "Well, then, I shall seek help elsewhere! "This was intolerable to them, and they therefore cursed him: "You have turned away from the light of truth (guru), and embraced the darkness of self-will. You will therefore become a dark being (caṇḍala), your exterior as impure and filthy as your interior is."

The next morning king Trisanku woke up to find that even his appearance had changed and that everything he touched or that came into contact with him became polluted and filthy. Seeing him thus transformed, his ministers and followers abandoned him and returned to the city. The king who had become an untouchable sought refuge with Visvamitra.

With a heart full of compassion Visvamitra asked Trisanku the cause of the dreadful transformation; and the latter narrated all that had happened. He had gone to Vasistha and his sons with the best of intentions; but all that was of no avail. Far from bodily ascending to heaven, he had even lost his royal physical appearance, and had become a despicable be- ing. I have always been a truthful and righteous king. I wanted to perform a hundred religious rites which would enable me bodily to ascend to heaven. Look at my present state! The unseen will of the divine alone is supreme; self-effort is Futile. The divine will overpowers everything: that divine Will alone is our last resort. Today I take your refuge; have no other refuge. Kindly find a way to overcome my fate through self-effort."

Greatly moved by the king's prayer, Visvamitra despatched his disciples in all directions to personally invite the holy men and priests to the sacred rite he had resolved to conduct on behalf of Trisanku, for the fulfilment of his wish. "Invite all, even the sons of Vasistha, on my behalf," said Visvamitra. A11 of them accepted the invitation and arrived at Visvamitra's hermitage forthwith except the sons of Vasistha who contemptuously turned down the

invitation. When he heard this. Visvamitra cursed them all in absentia: "Though they are sup- posed to be holy men engaged in austerities, they thus insult me! They will die and be born in seven hundred births to come as untouchables following despicable occupations."

uktta vakye munau tasmin saŝariro nare 'Svarah

divam jagama kakutstha muninam pasyatam tada (16)

Visvamitra was about to commence the sacred rite so that Trisanku might bodily ascend to heaven. Visvamitra said to the great sages and priests, assembled with him: "Along with me, engage yourselves in such a sacred rite as will enable Trisanku to ascend to heaven with his physical body."

Visvamitra himself became the chief priest at the rite. All of them commenced the sacred rite in strict accordance with scriptural injunctions relating to such a rite. They invoked the presence of the gods so that they might receive the offerings: but the gods failed to arrive. Visvamitra's anger grew fierce. Pouring an oblation into the sacred fire, he declared: "As the sole reward for the austerities performed by me in the exercise of my own free will, I claim the bodily ascension of Trišanku to heaven. O king, behold the power of my will, my self- effort: by these I send you to heaven in your own physical form."

At once, to the astonishment of all, Trisanku began to rise towards heaven in his physical form. Indra, the chief of the gods and the king of heaven, turned Trisanku away from the gates of heaven, saying: "Trisanku, since you have earned the curse of your own guru, you have no place in heaven! Return to earth." With these words, Indra threw him out, and Trisanku began to fall down. As he was heading back to the earth, he cried out to Visvamitra: "Save me, protect me."

Visvamitra's anger knew no bounds. He cried out: "Stop!" And Trisanku's fall was arrested, and he stopped suspended in space. With the merit earned by his austerities, and with his own self-effort, defying the wills of the gods, as it were, Visvamitra began to create another heaven, another set of planets and stars, another set of 'seven constellations' (like the Great Bear) to go round Trisanku (as the others go round the pole star) -- in short, a new galaxy in the southern quarter of the space. He was resolved even to create another Indra, or perhaps leave the new heaven without an Indra.

The outwitted gods and demons humbly approached Visvamitra and submitted: "Holy sir, this Trisanku had forfeited all his merits by provoking his guru to curse him, by defying his guru's counsel. Hence, he is incapable of ascending bodily to heaven." Visvamitra replied: "I have given my word that he will, and I cannot break my promise. Let him therefore enjoy heavenly bliss where he is. And let these heavenly bodies that I have created continue to exist during this world cycle." The gods agreed. They even granted that Trisanku would continue to remain suspended in space, but happy as a god.

pasur adya hṛto rajan pranasṭas tava durnayat

araksitaraṁ rajanam ghnanti dosa naresvaram (61.7)

A11 this, however, was an obstacle to Visvamitra's penance: for this incident depleted the merits that he had earned by his previous austerities. He abandoned his abode in the south and moved to Pushkar in the west, and recommenced his penance.

At the time, king Ambarisa was king of Ayodhya, and he was engaged in the performance of a horse rite. As usual, Indra stole the horse. The officiating priest was greatly distressed and said to the king: "By your neglect, the horse has been stolen; the sin of neglect destroys a monarch. If he cannot find the horse, the atonement prescribed is the offering of human sacrifice.

Shocked by this pronouncement, the king sought to find the horse. But he could not find it anywhere. In the course of his wanderings, he came to the hermitage of the sage Ṛcika and begged him to give him one of his sons for the purpose of the atonement. The sage refused to part with his first son; and similarly, his wife refused to part with the last son. The middle one, known as Sunahšepa, remarked: "The eldest son is indispensable to the father; the last one is indispensable to the mother; I guess I, the middle one, am the only dispensable one." Sunahsepa offered to go with the king who bestowed lavish presents on his parents, and left with the boy.

On the way, the boy Sunahsepa noticed Visvamitra engaged in austerities. The boy sought his refuge and prayed: "I have no one to look after me in this world, sir: so I seek your refuge. Kindly do something in such a way that the king's sacred rite might conclude successfully, and I might enjoy

long life to practise austerities and go to heaven." Moved to compassion, the royal sage turned to his own sons and demanded who would take Sunahsepa's place and thus save him. One of his sons taunted the father: "How strange, father, that you wish to throw away your own sons, in order to save someone else's son!" Visvamitra was angered at the son's impudence. Such impudence had to be punished, whether it was others' children or his own who were involved. He pronounced a curse: "You will suffer the same fate as the sons of Vasistha."

Turning to SunahSepa, Visvamitra said: "During the sacred rite, recite the two hymns I shall presently teach you. Your object will be achieved." Ambarişa resumed the interrupted rite and brought it to a conclusion. Sunahsepa recited the hymns and pleased with them Indra himself appeared on the spot, bles- sed Ambarişa and blessed Sunahsepa, with long life.

Visvamitra continued his austerities at Pushkar.

ürdhva bahur niralambo vayu bhaksas tapas caran

gharme pañcatapa bhutva varsasv akasa samsrayah

sisire salila sthayi ratryahani tapodhanah (63.24)

After a thousand years of austerities, the gods headed by Brahma the creator, went to the ascetic Visvamitra and announced: "You have now become a rsi", not just a royal sage. But, Visvamitra continued his austerities with added zeal.

One day a celestial nymph Menaka came to the Pushkar lake to bathe. The rsi saw her and lost his heart to her. She, too, responded to his invitation: and they began to live together in the rşi's hermitage. For ten years they thus lived together, enjoying all the pleasures. One day he realised that this was again an obstacle to his penance! Sensing the change that had come over him, Menaka stood trembling with fear: but the rşi took leave of her in affectionate words and went to the north.

Once again the austerities continued. Even the gods were astounded. They, and Brahma the creator, came to Visvamitra again, and announced; "I am pleased with your austerities and you are now the foremost among the rsis, and therefore a maha- rsi." Visvamitra humbly submitted: "If you had called me a brahmarsi, I would have thought that you considered me to have conquered my senses!" "Not yet," replied Brahma, and said: "Carry on!"

And, Visvamitra intensified his austerities. With uplifted arms, standing without support, eating nothing, sur- rounding himself with the five fires in summer, in the rainy season with nothing but the sky over-head, lying on bare ground in winter -he engaged himself in unprecedented austerities.

The gods were disturbed, for Visvamitra's austerities threatened their position and power. Indra said to another celestial nymph, Rambha: "Go, and distract his mind." She was afraid that the sage might curse her! "Fear not, I am also with you," said Indra; "I shall be near you as a bird." And, so Rambha went to the hermitage. Visvamitra saw her and under- stood the trap! And, he cursed her: "You came to ruin my austerities; well, stay there petrified. After a long time, the sage Vasistha will enable you to regain your celestial form." Rambha turned into a stone. Indra and Cupid quickly flew away!

But, Visvamitra did not rejoice. He had won a victory over lust; but he had succumbed to anger, and thereby lost the merit acquired by his austerities. "I shall conquer anger," said he to himself; "I shall not speak. I shall not even breathe. Till I attain the status of brahmana-hood I shall stand here, without food or drink, without even breath." Such a vow had not been taken by anyone before Visvamitra.

brahma rse svagatam te 'stu tapasa sma sutositah

brahmanyam tapaso 'grena praptavan asi kausika (19)

For the last and final part of his penance, Visvamitra chose the east. This time it was more severe than ever. However greatly he was provoked, he did not get angry. After a thousand years, when he had successfully completed the vow of fasting and silence, and he was about to break his fast and eat, Indra himself appeared in the disguise of a mendicant and begged for food. Quietly, without losing his patience, Visvamitra gave him the food he had prepared for himself, and, since nothing was left, continued his fasting and silence for another thousand years.

The 'fire' of his austerities, the psychic energy released by his penance, grew fierce. It appeared as if this energy would consume the whole world. The gods now approached Brahma the creator and prayed: "The energy generated by Visvamitra's penance is scorching the whole world. We have all of us tried by several means to distract him; but undistracted his penance

There is now no alternative but to grant him what- progresses. ever he chooses, even if it be the rulership of the gods."

Brahma and the gods went to where Visvamitra was engaged in penance, and the creator addressed Visvamitra: "I am highly pleased with your austerities, O Brahma-rsi! You have truly attained to brahmana-hood by dint of your own austerities. Overjoyed to hear the blessings of the creator, Visvamitra submitted: "If such be thy will, Lord, let 'Om' and Vasat, and let the Vedas come into my heart and become part of my being. Also I would like the recognition that I am now a brahma-şi to come from the supreme sage Vasistha."

Brahma and the gods then approached the sage Vasistha with the proposal. Vasistha immediately consented. He went over to Visvamitra, greeted him in a friendly way and said: "You are indeed a brahma-rşi, and you are fully accomplished." Visvamitra's supreme austerities had borne fruit."

Such is the glorious life of this mighty sage Visvamitra, O Rama: and you are indeed thrice blessed to enjoy his company and leadership, concluded Satananda.

Janaka who had also heard this most exalted story, now fell at the feet of the sage Visvamitra and exclaimed: "Truly blessed am I that, in the company of Rama, you have blessed this sacred rite being conducted by me. I am highly inspired by this story of yours narrated by Satananda. I long to hear more. Yet, I must excuse myself now as the hour of evening worship draws near. Kindly bless me again with your presence tomorrow."

bhagavan desta viryo me ramo daŝaratha 'tmajah

atyadbhutam acintyam ca na tarkitam idam maya (67.21)

Early next morning,king Janaka invited the sage Visvamitra and the princes Rama and Laksmana to the palace. On their arrival, he duly honoured them, and then addressed Visvamitra: "Holy sir, I await your commands: what can I do for you?" In reply, Visvamitra said: "These two sons of Dasaratha are eager to see the famous dhanuş you have."

The king sent for the dhanus; and in the meantime, told the story of the weapon, which is as follows:

"You know how lord Rudra wrecked the sacred rite of Daksa in days of yore. He was annoyed that the gods had not reserved a portion of the ritual offering for him, and threatened to kill them all with this weapon. The gods fell on their knees and appeased the Lord. At once, the Lord became pleased and gave them the weapon as a memento. The gods in their turn gave it to an ancestor of mine known as king Devarata.

"A few years ago a portion of my land was being ploughed, and I found a divine child in the furrow: I therefore called her Sita, and adopted her as my own daughter. She grew up into a beautiful young woman, and many princes wooed her. I did not wish to give away Sita, who was of immaculate birth, to an un- worthy person. It was decided that only that hero who could fire this weapon would earn the hand of Sita. All those princes and others tried their hand at it: but they did not even know what to do with it; they could not even touch it or hold it. If Rama fires this weapon, then I shall give him in marriage Sita of divine origin."

In the meantime, five thousand exceptionally strong men brought in the weapon with its strong casing, mounted on wheels. The sage Visvamitra said to Rama: "Rama, young man, please look at this weapon." Rama opened the casing and remarked: see "I what it is: I think I shall be able to handle it and to fire it too." And, as thousands of people were looking on, Rama mounted it, and filled it, and then fired it: with a loud roar the weapon broke in the middle. King Janaka said: "Holy one, I have now seen the strength of Rama, and I have seen with my own eyes, this supremely wonderful and incredible and indisputable feat. Sita has found her spouse, and she will import to the family of Janakas great fame and glory."

The king Janaka and the sage thereupon sent swift messengers to Ayodhya to inform king Dasaratha and to invite them all to Mithila for the auspicious wedding of Rama and Sita, raghavai saha sambandaid virya Sresthair mahatmabhih

Svah prabhate narendra tvam nirvartayitum arhasi (69.12)

King Janaka's ambassadors soon reached Ayodhya and sought an audience with the king Dasaratha. With folded palms and in a sweet voice, they submitted: "O king, the king Janaka conveys his greetings to you, through us his humble servants, and enquires after your welfare. He has sent through us, the following joyous message: 'You might already be aware that I had

vowed that he who is able to put to use the mighty weapon of the gods which is in my possession will win the hand of sita, my daughter. That condition was duly fulfilled by your great and worthy son Rama. I humbly pray that you will soon bless us with your presence so that I can fulfil my pledge and give Sita in marriage to Rama. This message has the hearty approval of both Visvamitra and Satananda."

Dasaratha was overjoyed to hear this message. He forth- with summoned his counsellors and his preceptors, conveyed to them the happy tidings and begged for their advice: "If king Janaka's credentials are acceptable to you, then we shall proceed to his capital, without loss of time." The counsellors and others hailed the proposal, and the pleased king decided that they would leave the next day.

Under the king Dasaratha's instructions, he was preceded by his treasurers with vast wealth and precious gems, and by a mighty army, then by the sages and the preceptors, then by the household priests. King Janaka's ambassadors had in the meantime conveyed this news to him. He organised a suitable reception in Mithila for the king Dasaratha. The meeting of these two monarchs was heart-warming and inspiring.

In his welcoming speech,king Janaka said: "I feel honoured and blessed by your visit to Mithila, best among men! You will soon behold your heroic sons. My house is exalted by this matrimonial alliance with the house of Raghu. Tomorrow morning after due ceremony, and with the blessings of the sages, you will witness the wedding."

In his reply, king Dasaratha said: "Thus have I heard: the recipient of a gift is in the hands of the giver! You are the giver, in as much as you wish to give your daughter in marriage to my son. And, I shall certainly do exactly as you say."

Such expression of goodwill and meekness on the part of the aged king Dasaratha moved the heart of king Janaka. Soon after this royal reception, Dasaratha saw and embraced Rama and Laksmana who humbly touched the father's feet. Then, all of them retired to their own apartments.

adi vaṁša visuddhanam rajñam parama dharmiṇam

iksvaku kulajatanaṁ viraṇam satya vadinam

rama-laksmanayor arthe tvat sute varaye nṛpa

The next morning, king Janaka sent for his brother Kušadh- vaja, the ruler of Sankasya, after informing him of the forth- coming event. Then he graciously invited king Dasaratha, with his preceptor and priests to the royal court. After taking his seat in the court, Dasaratha said: "The sage Vasistha is our spokesman, and I request him to acquaint you with my ancestry." Vasistha recounted the names of Dasaratha's ancestors, among whom were Marici, Kasyapa, the sun Vivasvan, Manu, Iksvaku, Mandhata, and Asita. Asita died in the Himalayas, leaving two wives who were each expecting a child. One of them gave poison to the other so that the foetus might be destroyed. Kalindi happened to meet the sage Chyavana, by whose grace the poisoned foetus was unharmed. This child who was poisoned before birth was known as Sagara as he was 'sa' (with) garena' (poison). After Sagara, Amsuman, Bhagiratha, Kakutstha, Raghu, and so on to Aja whose son is Dasaratha, whose sons are Rama and Laksmana. "Un- sullied is the line of Dasaratha, from the very beginning, aT1 the kings being pious and heroic and truthful. I seek the hands of your daughters for Rama and Laksmana. Worthy brides should be given to bridegrooms worthy of them," concluded Vasistha.

After this, king Janaka himself recounted his ancestry, as, he said: "On the occasion of the wedding of one's daughter to a worthy bridegroom, one belonging to a reputable dynasty should give an account of his ancestors." Among his ancestors were Nimi, Mithi, the first Janaka, Suketu, Devarata, Maharoma, Swarnaroma, and Hrasvaroma. "The last mentioned had two sons, Janaka continued; "myself and my brother Kušadhvaja. After in- stalling me on the throne, our father went away to the forest. Later, the powerful king of Sankasya, named Sudhanva invaded Mithila, but was defeated and killed by me. I then installed Kusadhvaja on the throne of Sankasya. Such is my ancestry. I say, and I say it thrice beyond doubt, that I give you my two daughters, Sita, who is of divine origin, and also my second daughter Urmila to be your daughters-in-law, Sita as the wife of Rama and Urmila as the wife of Laksmana. Let therefore the auspicious ceremonies connected with the wedding be immediately commenced. And, on the third day from now, the wedding itself will be celebrated. May gifts be lavishly given for the welfare of Rama and Laksmana."

iyam sita mama suta saha dharmacari tava

praticcha cai 'nam bhadram te panim grhnisva paṇina (73.27)

The two mighty sages Vasistha and Visvamitra approached king Janaka and submitted as follows: "O king, the houses of king Dasaratha and your own are incredibly great and incompar- able. It is therefore in the fitness of things that your daughters are to wed king Dasaratha's sons. But, there is more! We suggest that your brother Kusadhvaja's two daughters may be given in marriage to the two other sons of king Dasaratha." The delighted king Janaka replied with great humility: "I consider it a matchless blessing that this proposal comes from you two sages. Let it be even so may Kušadhvaja's daughters become the wives of Bharata and Satrughna."

Rising from his seat, the king Janaka pointed to two exalt- ed seats in the wedding pavilion for the two sages and humbly begged of them: "You have conferred the greatest dharma (blessing or merit) upon me. I am your humble disciple, O best among sages! Kindly accept these exalted seats. Kindly conduct the auspicious ceremonies." King Dasaratha at the same time took leave of kings Janaka and Kušadhvaja and retired to his camp for conducting the bridegrooms' part of the ceremonies. There he gave away in charity thousands of cows, adorned with gold, to the holy men, for the sake of his sons.

On the same day there arrived Yudhajit, the brother-in-law of king Dasaratha, and the brother of queen Kaikey, with the message that the queen's father was eager to behold his grandson Bharata and also Satrughna.

The wedding ceremony proper commenced in the pavilion. Dasaratha approached it and sent word to Janaka who said: "This is the emperor Dasaratha's own house; need he seek anyone's permission to enter? Come, we are all eagerly awaiting your arrival." The worship of the sacred fire commenced, as a preliminary to the wedding. The holiest among sages themselves recited the mantras. At the climax to the ceremony,king Janaka led Sita to Rama and placing her hand in his, said to Rama: "This is Sita, my daughter, O Rama, who is from today your partner in life. Accept her. Hold her hand in yours. She will always follow you as your shadow." The whole world and even the celestials rejoiced. Janaka then gave Ormila to Laksmana; and, on behalf of his brother, he gave Mandavi to Bharata, and Srutakirti to Satrughna.

All the four blessed couples then worshipped the sacred fire, and humbly bowed to and received the blessing of the sages and the parents. They then

retired to their apartments; after following them up to those apartments, the kings and others retired to their lodgings.

mama sarva vinasaya sampraptas tvam maha mune

na cai 'kasmin hate rame sarve jivamahe vayam (75.9)

The next morning, all the kings and sages and guests were ready to depart. The sage Visvamitra took leave of the kings and immediately proceeded to the Himalayas. And, king Dasaratha, too, was getting ready to leave. At that time, king Janaka gave him a very large and rich dowry thousands of cows, carpets, chariots, maid-servants, etc. King Janaka then returned to Mithila.

As king Dasaratha was heading for Ayodhya with his sons, daughters-in-law and others, there were mixed good and bad omens! Soon they saw at a distance a terrible dust-storm. And, then, there came into their view the powerful Parasurama with his axe and matted locks, the sworn enemy of ksatriyas. The perplexed sages and priests in Dasaratha's entourage received Parasurama with great respect and devotion. Undeflected in his determination, however, Parasurama turned to Rama and said:

"I heard of your marvellous exploit in firing the weapon which was in king Janaka's possession. I have brought another one with me! Fill it with ammunition and fire it, Ŏ Rama, and show me your valour and your strength. If you succeed in doing so, I shall engage you in a duel."

Hearing this, king Dasaratha was shocked: "O brahmana," he said; "you had promised to desist from killing the rulers and kings (kşatriyas), after having destroyed many of them. How is it that you are breaking your own word of honour? Surely, you have appeared here for my total annihilation; for without Rama none of us here would continue to live." Parasurama ignored this and continued to address Rama: "The weapon that you broke in Mithila and the one with me were both fashioned by Visvakarma. Lord Siva used the other one. This one was given to lord Visnu. Once the gods wished to determine which of the two deities was the more powerful. At Brahma's instigation they began to fight a duel. But, lord Viṣṇu silenced Siva's weapon. They then made peace. Thus outwitted, lord Siva then gave his weapon (which you broke recently) to Devarata. This one was given by lord Vispu to sage Ṛcika who in turn gave it to my father. He refused to use it: and taking advantage of this Sahasrabahu killed him. To avenge his death, I

have destroyed all the ksatriyas, won the world and presented it to the sage Kasyapa.

"Since then I have retired from active combat and am now living in the Mahendra Mountain. But, hearing of your feat in Mithila I have come here, to challenge you. Fill this weapon, too, and fire it if you can; then I shall offer you a duel."

ramasya silavṛttena sarve visaya vasinah

tesam atiyasa loke ramah satya parakramah (77.25)

After a respectful silence, in deference to the elders in the assembly, Rama replied: "Holy one, I have heard of you and of the way in which you have avenged your father's murder: and I approve of it. Now, witness my prowess!" Rama got hold of the weapon and loaded it and got it ready. In anger, Rama then said to Parasurama: "I cannot kill you with this, O Para-Surama, because you are a worshipful brahmana. But once readied it has to be fired. Tell me: at what shall I direct it? Either I shall make it impossible for you to move about; or, I can deprive you of the worlds you have earned (or, I can deprive you of your vision)."

Parasurama said: "I won the whole earth and gave it to the sage Kasyapa as my offering. He then told me: 'You should not live in my kingdom. Hence I retired to Mount Mahendra. But, please do not deprive me of locomotion. I shall go away to Mount Mahendra at once. You may deprive me of the worlds I have earned (or, my sight). I am not ashamed of having been defeated by you: for I know you are lord Viṣnu himself, and that is why you knew this weapon so well! Fire the weapon, O Rama, and I shall depart."

Rama discharged the missile. And Parasurama went away to the Mount Mahendra, after humbly saluting Rama.

Seeing that Dasaratha was still in a daze, Rama respectfully informed him of Parasurama's departure. All of them continued their journey. Soon they reached Ayodhya, the capital city. The citizens who had been informed of Rama's achievements and of his wedding, gathered throughout the royal route to look at, to cheer and to bless Rama. On arrival at the palace, the boys and their brides were lovingly received by the queens. Thenceforward, the four divine couples lived happily, fulfilling all their family, social and religious duties."

One day, king Dasaratha reminded Bharata and Satrughna that Bharata's uncle was waiting to take them to meet his grand father. Taking leave of his parents and also Rama, Bharata, along with Satrughna left for his grandfather's house.

Rama and Laksmana continued to serve their parents and preceptors. They did all the service which had to be done to their preceptors. They thus delighted the hearts of king Dasaratha, the holy ones and others. The people were highly pleased with the noble disposition of Rama. Sita and Rama were exceedingly devoted to each other. Sita knew even the un- expressed desires and intentions of Rama, and lovingly fulfilled them.

AYODHYA KANDAM

10th FEBRUARY

Life in Ayodhya

sa tu sresṭha gunair yukttah prajanam parthivatmajah

bahis cara iva prano babhuva gugatah priyah (1.19)

Queen Kausalya was filled with supreme delight to behold beloved Rama of unexcelled excellence grow into a young prince, even as Aditi rejoiced to see Indra. Rama was a perfectly perfect young man. He had all the noble qualities. He was fully self-controlled. He was patient with others' wrongs, but would do no wrong himself. He sought the company of elders and wise men. He had a highly cultivated mind, and his behaviour was highly cultured, too. His actions were governed by the highest code of righteousness; and he was not interested in unworthy conduct. In the science of warfare he was a pastmaster. He knew when to use violence, and when to restrain himself. Even his body was perfect, healthy, strong and handsome. He was alert in mind and was able to read the mind and the intentions of every- one that came to him. He was highly learned in the scriptures, and was therefore well versed in the injunctions and prohibitions concerning the three pursuits of life (dharma, material wealth, and also pursuit of pleasure). He did not display his pleasure or displeasure in relation

to others, and hence he earned the friendship of all. He was indeed the repository of all the good qualities, and he was, as it were, the very life of the people, moving outside their bodies.

King Dasaratha was delighted with all this: he was quite proud and fond of Rama. At this time he noticed omens portending terrible evil. And he was growing old, too: naturally, there- fore, he thought his own end was near. He mused: "How can I ensure that Rama ascends the throne even while I am alive? Truly, he is more than worthy of being king. I am very old and have lived long enough. It would be the greatest blessing to see Rama, the beloved of all, rule the earth before I go to heaven."

He did not lose much time before telling his ministers, preceptors and others about his wish. Since Rama was extremely popular with all his subjects as well as with the ministers and preceptors there was really no problem, nor any impediment in the way of his ascending the throne. The king then invited to his court, the leaders of the community from all the towns and cities of his kingdom, to ascertain their view. He also invited the kings and rulers of all the neighbouring kingdoms and states, to ensure their approval, too, so that Rama would be assured not only of the loyalty of his subjects but of the friendliness of all his neighbours. By an oversight, however, king Dasaratha had omitted to invite his own father-in-law the king of Kekayas and his son's father-in-law, king Janaka. All the invitees arrived, and assembled in the court.

Sakttas trailokyamapy eko bhoktum kim nu mahim imaṁ

nasya krodhah prasadasca nirarthosti kadacana (2.45)

King Dasaratha addressed the assembly in the following words: "I have lived long and shouldered the onerous duties of king for a very long time. This body is aged and fatigued. I wish to appoint my son to protect my people, and give this body its much-needed and well-earned rest in retirement. I am convinced that he will excel me and all my ancestors and that his rule will be a great good fortune to the earth. Is this accept- able to you all?" The assembly heartily applauded the king's proposal. Its spokesman said: "King, indeed you have ruled us well and for long. It is time that Rama, the beloved of all of us, is enthroned."

The king addressed them, again: "I am pleased with your spontaneous response. But, tell me, pray, why is it that you wish to have Rama enthroned even while I am alive?" The re- sponse was instantaneous and spontaneous again. The assembly assured the king that they were not displeased with him, but they adored Rama. The spokesman spoke up again: "Rama is a sat-purusa, the ideal man devoted to truth, the fountain of righteousness and welfare. He is richly endowed with know- ledge, wisdom, valour, compassion, self-control, every good quality that the ideal man should possess, and he totally identifies himself with the joys and sorrows of the people and as such, is the ideal ruler. He is fit to rule the three worlds, not just this one: and neither his anger nor his pleasure is purposeless. We feel that the kingdom is eager to have Rama installed on the throne. We know that all the people, especially the womenfolk daily pray that he should become their king." King Dasaratha was highly pleased and thanked them for their concurrence in his proposal."

After the assembly had dispersed, king Dasaratha humbly submitted to the sage Vasistha: "Holy sir, let everything need- ed be quickly done, to install Rama on the throne." Vasistha in turn instructed the ministers. They reported back to the king that all had been arranged.

The king thereupon sent for Rama who, on arrival, fell prostrate on the ground at the feet of his father. After em- bracing him, the king announced his intention: "You are my eldest and most beloved son; and you are the beloved of all our people. Hence ascend the throne as the yuvaraja (crown prince). You are excellent in every way: but on the eve of your enthronement I shall tender this friendly advice: 'Shun vices and adhere to righteousness. Do what is pleasing to your friends and the people, and they will be devoted to you!" In the meantime, some of Rama's friends went to his mother Kausalya and conveyed the exceedingly glad tidings to her. She and all the citizens who heard it prayed to God for the success of the enthronement.

tad yavadeva me ceto na vimuhyati raghave tivadevabhisincasva cala hi prasinan mati (4.20)

On second thoughts, king Dasaratha decided to send for Rama once more! Seeing Sumantra again outside his apartments, Rama wondered why he had come again, and encouraged him: "Tell me whatever you have in mind, unreservedly." Sumantra only said: "The king wants to see you again,

immediately." Rama went. The king spoke to Rama again: "I have lived a very long life, and I have enjoyed all the royal pleasures, I have given away a lot in charity, and I have performed many religious rites. After much prayer, you were born to me. I have redeemed all the debts a man owes to the sages, gods and the manes. The only thing that remains for me to do is to see you on the throne of Ayodhya. And, I see many ill omens, many terrible dreams, which portend calamity. Astrologers also say, that according to my stars a calamity is imminent. Hence, I wish to enthrone you immediately tomorrow! I must do it before the fickle mind changes; for the mind of human beings is fickle. I called you again to tell you this; tomorrow is your enthronement. Therefore, you should fast tonight, along with sita, and observe strict discipline. I think it is better that you are enthroned when Bharata is away from Ayodhya. He is indeed a noble boy; but no one can tell what the mind is capable of doing."

Rama left the king's presence, went to his own apartment but instantly turned away and sought the presence of his mother. She, along with Sumitra and her son Laksmana, was at the temple, offering prayers to the Lord for the success of the enthronement. Rama himself announced the king's intention to all of them and sought their blessings. Kausalya was de- lighted and blessed Rama: "Rama, my son, may you live long, free from enemies. May you bring joy to my relations, and those of Sumitra. I got you after years of unhappiness and austerities: but now they remain only like vague memories. My prayers have not gone in vain!" Rama looked at Laksmana and said: "I live for you, brother, and I accept even this crown for your sake. Rejoice and enjoy the sovereignty!" Then, Rama retired for the night.

But the king did not rest yet! He sent for Vasistha and conveyed his decision. "Please go to Rama and tell him all that he should do tonight." Vasistha went to Rama's palace: but the going was not easy. Word of Rama's enthronement had got round. There were crowds and crowds of people everywhere on the roads; and it was difficult to move much less drive a vehicle! The roads of Ayodhya got a thorough cleaning and Sprinkling with scented water. There were flags and buntings everywhere. Somehow Vasistha reached Rama's palace and instructed him to fast, etc. Then he returned to the king and informed him that the needful had been done. And, the king retired to his apartment.

dhyayan narayanam devam svastirne kusasamstare

vagyatab saha vaidehya bhutva niyata manasab

Srimaty ayatane vispoh sisye naravaratmajah (6.3-4)

When Vasistha had left his palace, Rama bathed and went to the temple of lord Narayana. After worshipping the Lord, he, along with Sita, lay down on a grass mat, with his senses con- trolled, and mind offered at the feet of lord Narayana. He awoke three hours before sunrise and busied himself with the worship of the Lord and the various religious rites preliminary to the enthronement ceremony.

Everywhere in the city, people were congregating and discussing the glorious event of the day. Troupes of artistes were performing, some of them enacting plays based on the lives of Rama and his ancestors. Everywhere people had also erected 'dipa-vṛksa' (trees with decorative lamps). Everybody was sing- ing the glories of Rama.

Somehow, Kaikey (the last wife of Dasaratha) had not been informed of all this. Her maid-servant Manthara happened to see the festivities and the celebrations in the city, and also she noticed that Kausalya's maid-servants were expensively dressed. On enquiry, she discovered the cause of all this. She rushed to Kaikeyi who had retired to bed and violently shook her saying in great agitation: "Get up! How can you rest? A great calamity awaits you. The person you love most, the person who pretends to love you dearly and whom you trust implicitly, is about to betray you and plunge you into misery." Calmly Kaikeyi asked her: "Are you sick? What are you saying?" Getting still more agitated Manthara said: "Your ruin is at hand. King Dasaratha is going to crown Rama tomorrow."

Manthara went on: "You are the daughter of a king. You are the beloved consort of a great king. Yet, you do not realise the intricacies of palace intrigues. I am only your maid- servant who is devoted to your welfare. I can clearly see your downfall when Rama and therefore his own mother Kausalya, will become all-powerful, and your good fortune, and therefore mine, too, will come to an end. Oh, what a tragedy: you trusted and loved the king, not realising that you were holding a venomous reptile close to your bosom. You and your son Bharata have been deceived by the king. Awake, Kaikeyt, and act quickly to save yourself."

Pleased with the good news and not responding to Manthara's panic, Kaikey gave rich and valuable presents to the maid- servant, saying: "I do not see any difference between Rama and Bharata; therefore, I am delighted to hear that the king is go- ing to crown Rama."

gato 'dake setu bandho na kalyani vidhiyate

uttiṣṭha kuru kalyani rajanam anudarsaya (9.54)

Contemptuously throwing away the precious royal gifts, Manthara continued: "How foolish of you to rejoice at the success of your enemy! Lucky Kausalya! Very soon she will have you as her chief maid-servant. And, your beloved son Bharata who could be king, who has every right to be king, who is as much eligible to be king as Rama is, might even be banished from the kingdom, if not from this earth!" Disgusted with the way Manthara went on, Kaikeyi said firmly: "What has come over you, O Manthara? Rama is as dear to me as Bharata. Rama, too, treats me with greater devotion and serves me more than he serves Kausalya. If Rama is crowned king, it is as good as if Bharata is crowned king, for Rama treats Bharata as his own self." But Manthara could not be silenced: she went on and on.

Manthara's persistence paid off. Her evil counsel worked. Kaikey's anger was roused. She said: "Kindly devise a plan: what can I do?" Exulting over her victory, Manthara quickly answered: "Of course, I have the plan ready. You yourself told me that during a war between Indra and the demons, king Dasaratha lay wounded and unconscious on the field, and you saved his life, and that he then offered you two boons which, however, you did not choose at that time. Probably you have forgotten: because I love you, I remember that story. First make the king promise that he will now honour his offer and give the two boons of your choice. And these should be: first, Bharata should be installed on the throne, and second, Rama should be banished from the kingdom for fourteen years. If Rama goes away for fourteen years, Bharata who has all the qualities of a monarch, can win the confidence of the people and consolidate his position. The king loves you dearly and will not refuse the boons. He might, however, offer gold and jewels instead: refuse to accept them. Let nothing deflect you from this twofold purpose. Do not be content with Bharata's coronation: insist on Rama's banishment."

Manthara's persuasiveness made evil appear to be good! Kaikey fell for it. She even glorified Manthara: "They say that deformed people are sinful and wicked, but in your case, the hunchback is packed with wonderful tricks. I should worship the hump which enhances your most charming form." Manthara re- turned to her theme: "No one builds a dam after the water has flowed away! Do it now." Entering the chamber of displeasure Kaikey threw around herself the jewelry that had adorned her and flung herself on the floor, and said to Manthara: "Rama shall go to the forest; Bharata shall be king or you will in- form the king that I am dead." Finally, once more, Manthara reminded Kaikey of the danger ahead and counselled her to stand fast on her decision.

cira 'jina jaṭa dhari ramo bhavatu tapasah

bharato bhajatam adya yauvarajyam akanṭakam (11.27)

When all the arrangements for the coronation had been made the king wanted to convey the happy news to his beloved wife Kaikey. He entered her palace which shone like a celestial mansion. He did not find her in the bed-chamber: overcome by an intense desire to be with her, he enquired about her where- abouts. Never before had she failed to lovingly greet him at that hour! A maid-servant informed the king: "In great anger. the queen is lying in the chamber of displeasure." Greatly distressed by this information, the king rushed to that chamber and saw his most beloved queen lying on the floor, with all her jewelry flung around her person. Sitting by her side, taking her hand into his, the king addressed her in the following con- soling words: "My beloved, are you not well? Tell me: I shall have you served by the best and most able doctors. Has someone insulted you? Or, do you wish that someone should be killed who does not deserve to be killed, or do you wish a condemned person to be freed? Do you wish that I should enrich a pauper or deprive a wealthy man of his wealth? Myself and all that belongs to me are yours, and I cannot go against your wishes. Please get up and tell me what the matter is."

Thus comforted, Kaikeyi resolved to torment her husband still further. She said: "First, promise that you will do what I ask you to do; and then I shall let you know what I want." Delighted at the prospect of reconciliation, the king said: "In the name of Rama whom I love most and without whom I

cannot live even for a moment, I promise to do whatever you wish." And he thus promised thrice, and once again prayed to her to name her wish.

Taking the fullest and immediate advantage of this, Kaikeyi called the very gods to witness the proceedings, in the follow- ing words: "You are a righteous monarch: let the gods bear witness to your most solemn vow." Then, she proceeded: "Do you remember that on the battlefield when I saved your life, you offered me two boons? I said then that I would ask for them later. I want them now." The king patiently waited for her to name the boons. He was bound by his own vow. Kaikeyi continued: "You have made elaborate preparations to install Rama on the throne. Using the same preparations, my son Bharata should be installed on the throne. This is my first boon. And the second boon is: let Rama immediately proceed to Dagdaka forest and live there as a hermit for fourteen years. Wearing the bark of trees and deer skin, let Rama become a hermit; and let Bharata enjoy the sovereignty of the kingdom. You are devoted to truth, and the wise say that truthfulness is the key to heaven. Therefore, adhere to your promise."

jiva loko yada sarvo ramasya 'ha gunastavam

aparadham kam uddisya tyakşyami 'sṭam aham sutam (11)

Hit by the cruel shafts of Kaikeyt's words, the king was stupefied for a few moments. He wondered: "Am I fancying all this, or is my mind deranged, or is my mind re-enacting a past event or am I sick?" But a look at Kaikeyi convinced him that it was none of these. It was real. He promptly fainted. When he came to, he spoke to Kaikeyi in great anger and anguish : "Wicked woman, what has Rama done to you that you are so cruel to him? He is more devoted to you, than to his mother: and you yourself used to praise him to me. The whole world sings his glory; for what fault shall I exile him? Oh, no: I shall abandon Kausalya, Sumitra, all my wealth, and even my life: but I shall not abandon my beloved Rama. If you wish, I shall crown Bharata."

But, Kaikeyi was unyielding. She said: "Ah, well, if you wish to go back on your word, if you wish to disgrace the fame of your dynasty, if you wish to be the laughing stock of wise and noble men, do so! Forsaking righteousness would you like to enjoy life with Kausalya and Rama? Shame on you. If my boons are not granted, I shall take poison and die!" Dasaratha began to wail and rave: but Kaikeyi did not even seem to listen. See- ing her determination

and the terrible promise made by him, Dašaratha thought of Rama and fell down like a felled tree.

Dasaratha pleaded again: "If I agree to your demands,people will say of me: For the sake of a woman, the king banished the noble and righteous Rama; how could such a fool rule Ayodhya for so long?! For your sake I ignored all the loving service that Kausalya rendered to me, though to me she was a servant, a friend, a wife, a sister and a mother all in one, and she is the mother of my pet son. Ah, I did not realise that I was harbouring in you a venomous cobra in the shape of a wife! If I send Rama away, Laksmana also will go with him. Unable to bear his separation I shall die. You will rule as a widow: and how cruelly you will govern my beloved people! If I tell Rama, 'Go to the forest', he will instantly obey me. He is incarnate dharma. How can you even conceive of this tender and glorious prince going to the forest, living on roots and fruits, wearing coarse apparel and roaming the forest on foot? If Bharata is pleased with this proposal to banish Rama, he should not even perform my obsequies. Cruel woman, when you uttered those cruel words, your teeth should have broken into pieces and fallen from your mouth. I do not care if you faint, burn yourself, die, or enter the bowels of the earth: I will not do as you ask me to do. I bow down to you. I even touch your feet. Please bless me and save me." Dasaratha fell down, though his hands could not reach Kaikeyi's outstretched feet.

dharma bandhena baddho 'smi nasṭa ca mama cetana

jyesṭham putram priyam ramam drasṭum icchami dharmikam (14.24)

But, Kaikey was unmoved, and repeated: "I am only claiming the boons which I had already earned and which are due to me. You promise, you break your promise, and you also boast that you are righteous!" Once again, Dasaratha lost his consciousness. On regaining consciousness, he once again pleaded: "Surely I shall die when Rama leaves Ayodhya. If the gods question me in the other world, if I reply: On account of my love for Kaikeyi, Rama went to the forest' even that would be untruth. How can I ask my beloved Rama to go to Dandaka forest? If I die before inflicting this undeserved pain on Rama, that will indeed be better for me." Kaikey was unmoved; but time moved on.

It was getting close to dawn. The palace musicians began to play the music with which they usually awoke the king; but the king stopped them that day.

He was awake, distressed and restless. Seeing this, Kaikeyi declared: "You have promised the boons; why are you lying down like this? You should get busy fulfilling your promise. The knowers of righteous conduct declare that truth alone is the highest dharma; standing firmly on truth I prompt you to do what is right. The king Sibi attained to the supreme state by adhering to truth and sacrificing his very body. By parting with his very eyes and giving them to a brahmana, the king Alarka attained fame. Adhering to truth and in fulfilment of its promise, the ocean does not transgress its bounds. Stick to truth. Send your son to the forest. If you do not, I shall die here in front of you."

Dasaratha clearly saw that he was bound by his own word. He cried: "I disown you and your son. When I die, let Rama offer the libations. The libations should not be offered by you or your son. I have seen the joy on the faces of my people; how shall I see their grief-stricken faces on Rama's departure to the forest?" But, Kaikeyi urged him: "Time is passing. Instead of wailing thus, call Rama; when you send him away to the forest and install Bharata on the throne, you will have discharged your duty." Dasaratha agreed: "I am bound by the cords of dharma; I have lost my sense. I wish to see Rama.

Eager to commence the auspicious ceremonies, Vasistha and his retinue arrived at the palace. He sent Sumantra to the king to announce his arrival and that everything was ready for the installation ceremony. Sumantra approached the room where the king was and in sublime words awakened him. They were hurtful to the agonised king who stopped him. The king could not speak: hence, Kaikey said on his behalf: "The king was awake the whole night and he is tired. He wishes to see Rama. "Puzzled, Sumantra looked at the king who confirmed: "Go and fetch Rama." He left.

labho janasya 'sya tad esa sarvam prapatsyate rastram idam na hy apriyam kimcana jatu kascit pasyen na duhkham ciraya manuja 'dhipė 'smin (16.45)

The brahmanas had got everything ready for the coronation ceremonies. Gold pots of holy water from all the sacred rivers, most of them gathered at their very source, were ready. All the paraphernalia like the umbrella, the chowries, an elephant and a white horse, were ready, too.

But, the king did not emerge, though the sun had risen and the auspicious hour was fast approaching. The priests and the people wondered: "Who can

awaken the king, and inform him that he had better hurry up!" At that moment, Sumantra emerged from the palace. Seeing them, he told them: "Under the king's orders I am going to fetch Rama." But, on second thought, knowing that the preceptors and the priests commanded even the king's respect, he returned to the king's presence to announce that they were awaiting him. Standing near the king, Sumantra sang: "Arise, O king! Night has flown. Arise and do what should be done." The weary king asked: "I ordered you to fetch Rama, and I am not asleep. Why do you not do as you are told to do? This time, Sumantra hurried out of the palace and sped to Rama's palace.

Entering the palace and proceeding unobstructed through the gates and entrances of the palace, Sumantra beheld the divine Rama, and said to him: "Rama, the king who is in the company of queen Kaikey desires to see you at once." Immediately, Rama turned to Sita and announced: "Surely, the king and mother Kaikeyi wish to discuss with me some important details in connection with the coronation ceremony. I shall go and return soon." Sita, for her part, offered a heartfelt prayer to the gods: "May I have the blessing of humbly serving you during the auspicious coronation ceremony!"

As Rama emerged from his palace there was great cheer among the people who hailed and applauded him. Ascending his swift chariot he proceeded to the king's palace, followed by the regalia. Women standing at the windows of their houses and richly adorned to express their joy, showered flowers on Rama. They praised Kausalya, the mother of Rama; they praised sita, Rama's consort: "Obviously she must have done great penance to get him as her husband." The people rejoiced as if they themselves were being installed on the throne. They said to one another: "Rama's coronation is truly a blessing to all the people. While he rules, and he will rule for a long time, no one will even have an unpleasant experience, or ever suffer." Rama too was happy to see the huge crowds of people, the elephants and the horses -- indicating that people had come to Ayodhya from afar to witness the coronation.

etas ce 'nyas ca suhrdam udasinab katha subhab

atma sampujanih sṛnvan yayau ramo maha patham (17.12)

As Rama proceeded in his radiant chariot towards his father's palace, the people were saying to one another: "We shall be supremely happy hereafter,

now that Rama will be king. But, who cares for all this happiness? When we behold Rama on the throne, we shall attain eternal beatitude!" Rama heard all this praise and the people's worshipful homage to him, with ut- ter indifference as he drove along the royal road. The chariot entered the first gate to the palace. From there on Rama went on foot and respectfully entered the king's apartments. The people who had accompanied him eagerly waited outside.

Rushing eagerly and respectfully to his father's presence, Rama bowed to the feet of his father and then devoutly touched the feet of his mother KaikeyT, too. "O Rama!" said the king: he could not say anything more, because he was choked with tears and grief. He could neither see nor speak to Rama. Rama sensed great danger: as if he had trodden on a most poisonous serpent. Turning to Kaikeyi, Rama asked her: "How is it that today the king does not speak kindly to me? Have I offended him in any way? Is he not well? Have 1 offended prince Bharata or any of my mothers? Oh, it is agonising: and incurring his displeasure I cannot live even for an hour. Kindly reveal the truth to me."

In a calm, measured and harsh tone, Kaikeyi now said to Rama: "The king is neither sick nor angry with you. What he must tell you he does not wish to, for fear of displeasing you. He granted me two boons. When I named them, he recoiled. How can a truthful man, a righteous king, go back on his own word? Yet that is his predicament at the moment. I shall reveal the truth to you if you assure me that you will honour your father's promise." For the first time Rama was distressed: "Ah, shame! Please do not say such things to me! For the sake of my father I can jump into fire. And, I assure you, Rama does not indulge in double talk. Hence, tell me what the king wants to be done."

Kaikeyi lost no time. She said: "Long ago I rendered him a great service, and he granted me two boons. I claimed them now: and he promised. I asked for these boons: that Bharata should be crowned, and that you should go away to Dandaka forest now. If you wish to establish that both you and your father are devoted to truth, let Bharata be crowned with the same paraphernalia that have been got ready for you, and go away to the forest for fourteen years. Do this, O best of men, for that is the word of your father; and thus would you redeem the king."

aham hi sitam rajyam ca pranan iṣṭan dhanani ca

hrsto bhratre svayam dadyam bharataya 'pracoditah (19.7)

Promptly and without the least sign of the slightest dis- pleasure, Rama said: "So be it! I shall immediately proceed to the forest, to dwell there clad in bark and animal skin. But why does not the king speak to me, nor feel happy in my presence? Please do not misunderstand me; shall go, and I myself will gladly give away to my brother Bharata the kingdom, wealth, Sita and even my own Life, and it is easier when all this is done in obedience to my father's command. Let Bharata be immediately requested to come. But it breaks my heart to see that father does not say a word to me directly."

Kaikeyi said sternly: "I shall attend to all that, and send for Bharata. I think, however, that you should not delay your departure from Ayodhya even for a moment. Even the consideration that the father does not say so himself, should not stop you. Till you leave this city, he will neither bathe nor eat." Hearing this, the king groaned, and wailed aloud: "Alas, alas!" and became unconscious again. Rama decided to leave at once and he said to Kaikeyi: "I am not fond of wealth and pleasure: but even as the sages are, I am devoted to truth. Even if father had not commanded me, and you had asked me to go the forest I would have done so! I shall presently let my mother and also Sita know of the position and immediately leave for the forest."

Rama was not affected at all by this sudden turn of events. As he emerged from the palace, with Laksmana, the people tried to hold the royal umbrella over him: but he brushed them aside. Still talking pleasantly and sweetly with the people, he entered his mother's apartment. Delighted to see him, Kausalya began to glorify and bless him and asked him to sit on a royal seat. Rama did not, but calmly said to her: "Mother, the king has decided to crown Bharata as the yuvaraja and I am to go to the forest and live there as a hermit for fourteen years." When she heard this, the queen fell down unconscious and grief-stricken. In a voice choked with grief, she said : "If I had been barren, I would have been unhappy; but I would not have had to endure this terrible agony. I have not known a happy day throughout my life. have had to endure the taunts and the insults of the other wives of the king. Nay, even he did not treat me with kindness or consideration : i have always been treated with less affection and respect than Kaikey's servants were treated. I thought that after your birth, and after your coronation my luck would

change. My hopes have been shattered. Even death seems to spurn me. Surely, my heart is hard as it does not break into pieces at this moment of the greatest misfortune and sorrow. Life is not worth living without you; so if you have to go to the forest, I shall follow you."

gurus ca raja ca pita ca vrddhah krodhat praharsad yadi va pi kamat

yad vyadiset karyam aveksya dharmam kastam nakuryad anṛsamsa vṛttih (59)

Laksmana said: "I think Rama should not go to the forest. The king has lost his mind, overpowered as he is by senility and lust. Rama is innocent. And, no righteous man in his senses would forsake his innocent son. A prince with the least know- ledge of statesmanship should ignore the childish command of a king who has lost his senses." Turning to Rama, he said: "Rama, here I stand, devoted to you, dedicated to your cause. I am ready to kill anyone who would interfere with your coronation even if it is the king! Let the coronation proceed without delay."

Kausalya said: "You have heard Lakshmana's view. You can- not go to the forest because Kaikeyi wants you to. If, as you say, you are devoted to dharma, then it is your duty to stay here and serve me, your mother. I, as your mother am as much worthy of your devotion and service as your father is: and I do not give you permission to go to the forest. If you disobey me in this, terrible will be your suffering in hell. I cannot live here without you. If you leave, I shall fast unto death." Rama, devoted as he was to dharma, spoke: "Among our ancestors were renowned kings who earned fame and heaven by doing their father's bidding. Mother, I am but following their noble example." To Laksmana he said: " Laksmana, I know your devotion to me, love for me, your prowess and your strength. The universe rests on truth: and I am devoted to truth. Mother has not understood my view of truth, and hence suffers. But I am unable to give up my resolve. Abandon your resolve based on the principle of might; resort to dharma; let not your intellect become aggressive. Dharma, prosperity and pleasure are the pursuit of mankind here; and prosperity and pleasure surely follow dharma: even as pleasure and the birth of a son follow a dutiful wife's service of her husband. One should turn away from that action or mode of life which does not ensure the of all the three goals of life, particularly of attainment dharma; for hate springs from wealth and the pursuit of pleasure is not praiseworthy. The

commands of the guru, the king, and one's aged father, whether uttered in anger, cheerfully, or out of lust, should be obeyed by one who is of despicable not with a view to the promotion of dharma. Hence, behaviour cannot swerve from the path of dharma which demands that should implicitly obey our father. It is not right for you, mother, to abandon father and follow me to the forest, as if you are a widow. Therefore, bless me, mother, so that I may have a pleasant and successful term in the forest."

rsayo 'py ugra tapaso daivena 'bhiprapiḍitah

utsṛjya niyamans tivran bhrasyante kama manyubhih (22.23)

Rama addressed Laksmana again: "Let there be no delay, Laksmana. Get rid of these articles assembled for the corona- tion. And with equal expedition make preparations for my leaving the kingdom immediately. Only thus can we ensure that mother Kaikeyi attains peace of mind. Otherwise she might be worried that her wishes may not be fulfilled! Let father's promise be fulfilled. Yet, so long as the two objects of Kai- keyi's desire are not obtained, there is bound to be confusion in everyone's mind. I must immediately leave for the forest; then Kaikey will get Bharata here and have him installed on the throne. This is obviously the divine will and I must honour it without delay. My banishment from the kingdom as well as my return are all the fruits of my own doing (krtanta: end of action). Otherwise, how could such an unworthy thought enter the heart of noble Kaikeyi? I have never made any distinction between her and my mother; nor has she ever shown the least disaffection for me so far. The 'end' (reaction) of one's own action cannot be foreseen: and this which we call 'daiva' (providence or divine will) cannot be known and cannot be avoided by anyone. Pleasure, pain, fear, anger, gain, loss, life and death all these are brought about by 'daiva'. Even sages and great ascetics are prompted by the divine will to give up their self-control and are subjected to lust and anger. It is unforeseen and inviolable. Hence, let there be no hostility towards Kaikeyi; she is not to blame. All this is not her doing, but the will of the divine."

Laksmana listened to all this with mixed feelings: anger at the turn events had taken, and admiration for Rama's attitude. Yet, he could not reconcile himself to the situation as Rama had done. In great fury, he burst forth: "Your sense of duty is misdirected, O Rama. Even so is your estimation of

the divine will. How is it, Rama, that being a shrewd statesman, you do not see that there are self-righteous people who merely pretend to be good for achieving their selfish and fraudulent ends? If all these boons and promises be true, they could have been asked for and given long ago! Why did they have to wait for the eve of coronation to enact this farce? You ignore this aspect and bring in your argument of the divine will! Only cowards and weak people believe in an unseen divine will: heroes and those who are endowed with a strong mind do not believe in the divine will. Ah, people will see today how my determination and strong action set aside any decrees of the divine will which may be involved in this unrighteous plot. Whoever planned your exile will go into exile! And you will be crowned today. These arms, Rama, are not handsome limbs, nor are these weapons worn by me ornaments: they are for your service."

yavaj jivati kakutsthah pita me jagati patih

šušrusa kriyatam tavat sa hi dharmah sanatanah (24.13) bhartaram na 'nuvarteta sa tu papa gatir bhavet

bhartuh Susrüşaya nari labhate svargam uttamam (24.26)

Kausalya said again: "How can Rama born of me and the mighty emperor Dasaratha live on food obtained by picking up grains and vegetables and fruits that have been discarded? He whose servants eat dainties and delicacies-- how will he subsist on roots and fruits? Without you, Rama, the fire of separation from you will soon burn me to death. Nay, take me with you, too, if you must go."

Rama replied: "Mother, that would be extreme cruelty towards father. So long as father lives, please serve him: this is the eternal religion. To a woman her husband is verily god himself. I have no doubt that the noble Bharata will be very and kind to you serve you as I serve you. I am anxious that when I am gone, you should console the king so that he does not feel my separation at all. Even a pious woman who is otherwise righteous, if she does not serve her husband, is deemed to be sinner. On the other hand. she who serves her husband attains blessedness even if she does not worship the gods, perform the rituals or honour the holy men."

Seeing that Rama was inflexible in his resolve, Kausalya regained her composure and blessed him. "I shall eagerly await. your return to Ayodhya, after your fourteen years in the forest," said Kausalya.

Quickly gathering the articles necessary, she performed a sacred rite to propitiate the deities and thus to ensure the health, safety, happy sojourn and quick return of Rama. "May dharma which you have protected so zealously protect you always," said Kausalya to Rama. "May those to whom you bow along the roads and the shrines protect you! Even so, let the missiles which the sage Visvamitra gave you ensure your safety. May all the birds and beasts of the forest,celestial beings and gods, the mountains and the oceans, and the deities presiding over the lunar mansions, natural phenomena and the seasons be propitious to you. May the same blessedness be with you that Indra enjoyed on the destruction of his enemy Vrtra, that Vinata bestowed upon her son Garuda, that Aditi pronounced upon her son Indra when he was fighting the demons, and that Visnu enjoyed while he measured the heaven and earth. May the sages. the oceans, the continents, the Vedas and the heavens be propitious to you."

As Rama bent low to touch her feet, Kausalya fondly embraced him and kissed his forehead, and then respectfully went round him before giving him leave to go.

rddhi yuktta hi purusa na sahante parastavam

tasman na te gunah kathya bharatasya grato mama (26.25)

Taking leave of his mother, Rama sought the presence of his beloved wife, Sita. For her part, Sita who had observed all the injunctions and prohibitions connected with the eve of the coronation and was getting ready to witness the auspicious event itself, perceived her divine spouse enter the palace and with a heart swelling with joy and pride, went forward to receive him. His demeanour, however, puzzled her: his countenance reflected sorrow and anxiety. Shrewd as she was she realised that something was amiss, and hence asked Rama: "The auspicious hour is at hand; and yet what do I see! Lord, why are you not accompanied by the regalia, by men holding the ceremonial um- brella, by the royal elephant and the horses, by priests chant- ing the Vedas, by bards singing your glories? How is it that your countenance is shadowed by sorrow?"

Without losing time and without mincing words, Rama an- nounced: "Sita, the king has decided to install Bharata on the throne and to send me to the forest for fourteen years. I am actually on my way to the forest and have come to say good-bye to you. Now that Bharata is the yuvaraja, nay king, please be- have appropriately towards him. Remember: people who are in power do not put up with those who sing others glories in their presence: hence do not glorify me in the presence of Bharata It is better not to sing my praises even in the presence of your companions. Be devoted to your religious observances and serve my father, my three mothers and my brothers. Bharata and Satrughna should be treated as your own brothers or sons. Take great care to see that you do not give the least offence to Bharata, the king. Kings reject even their own sons if they are hostile, and are favourable to even strangers who may be friendly. This is my counsel."

Sita feigned anger, though in fact she was amused. She re- plied to Rama: "Your advice that I should stay here in the pal- ace while you go to live in the forest is unworthy of a heroic prince like you, Lord. Whereas one's father, mother, brother, son and daughter-in-law enjoy their own good or misfortune, the wife alone shares the life of her husband. To a woman, neither father nor son nor mother nor friends but the husband alone is her sole refuge here in this world and in the other world, too. Hence I shall accompany you to the forest. I shall go ahead of you, clearing a path for you in the forest. Life with the husband is incomparably superior to life in a palace, or an aerial mansion, or a trip to heaven! I have had detailed instructions from my parents on how to conduct myself in Ayodhya! But I shall not stay here. I assure you, I shall not be a burden, an impediment, to you in the forest. Nor will I regard life in the forest as exile or as suffering. With you it will be more than heaven to me. It will not be the least hardship to me; without you, even heaven is hell."

krta ksana 'ham bhadram te gamanam prati raghava

vana vasasya šurasya carya hi mama rocate (29.15)

Thinking of the great hardships they would have to endure in the forest, however, Rama tried to dissuade Sita in the following words: "Sita, you come of a very wealthy family dedicated to righteousness. It is therefore proper that you should stay behind and serve my people here.. Thus, by avoiding the hardships of the forest and by lovingly serving my people here,

would you gladden my heart. The forest is not a place for a princess like you. It is full of great dangers. Lions dwell in the caves; and it is frightening to hear their roar. These wild beasts are not used to seeing human beings; the way they attack human beings is horrifying even to think about. Even the paths are thorny and it is hard to walk on them. The food is a few fruits which might have fallen on their own accord from the trees: living on them, one has to be contented all day. Our garments will be bark and animal skins: and the hair will have to be matted and gathered on the top of the head. Anger and greed have to be given up, the mind must be directed towards austerity and one should overcome fear even where it is natural. Totally exposed to the inclemencies of nature, surrounded by wild animals, serpents and so on, the forest is full of untold hardships. It is not a place for you, my dear."

This reiteration on the part of Rama moved Sita to tears. "Your gracious solicitude for my happiness only makes my love for you more ardent, and my determination to follow you more firm. You mentioned animals: they will never come anywhere near me while you are there. You mentioned the righteousness of serving your people: but, your father's command that you should go to the forest demands should go, too; I am your half: and because of this, again I cannot live without you. In fact you have often declared that a righteous wife will not be able to live separated from her husband. And listen! This is not new to me: for even when I was in my father's house, long before we were married, wise astrologers had rightly predicted that I would live in a forest for some time. If you remember, I have been longing to spend some time in the forest, for I have trained myself for that eventuality. Lord, I feel actually delighted at the very thought that I shall at last go to the forest, to serve you constantly. Serving you, shall not in- cur the sin of Teaving your parents: thus have I heard from those who are well-versed in the Vedas and other scriptures. that a devoted wife remains united with her husband even after they leave this earth-plane. There is therefore no valid reason why you should wish to leave me here and go. If you still refuse to take me with you, I have no alternative but to lay down my life."

Svadhinam samatikramya mataram pitaran gurum

asvadhinam katham daivam prakarair abhiradhyate (30.33)

To the further persuasive talk of Rama, Sita responded with a show of annoyance, courage and firmness. She even taunted Rama in the following words: "While choosing you as his son-in- law, did my father Janaka realise that you were a woman at heart with a male body? Why, then are you, full of valour and courage, afraid even on my account? If you do not take me with you I shall surely die; but instead of waiting for such an event, I prefer to die in your presence. If you do not change your mind now, I shall take poison and die." In sheer anguish, the pitch of her voice rose higher and higher, and her eyes released a torrent of hot tears.

Rama folded her in his arms and spoke to her lovingly, with great delight: "Sita, I could not fathom your mind and therefore I tried to dissuade you from coming with me. Come, follow me. Of course I cannot drop the idea of going to the forest, even for your sake. I cannot live having disregarded the command of my parents. Indeed, I wonder how one could adore the unmanifest god, if one were unwilling to obey the commands of his parents and his guru whom he can see here. No religious activity nor even moral excellence can equal service of one's parents in bestowing supreme felicity on one. What- ever one desires, and whatever region one desires to ascend to after leaving this earth-plane, all this is secured by the service of parents. Hence I shall do as commanded by father; and this is the eternal dharma. And you have rightly resolved, to follow me to the forest. Come, get ready soon. Give away generous gifts to the brahmanas and distribute the rest of your possessions to the servants and others."

Laksmana now spoke to Rama: "If you are determined to go, then I shall go ahead of you." Rama, however, tried to dissuade him: "Indeed, I know that you are my precious and best companion. Yet, I am anxious that you should stay behind and look after our mothers. Kaikeyi may not treat them well. By thus serving our mothers, you will prove your devotion to me." But Laksmana replied quickly: "I am confident, Rama, that Bharata will look after all the mothers, inspired by your spirit of renunciation and your adherence to dharma. If this does not prove to be the case, I can exterminate all of them in no time. Indeed, Kausalya is great and powerful enough to look after herself: she gave birth to you! My place is near you; my duty to serve you."

Delighted to hear this, Rama said: "Then let us all go. Before leaving I wish to give away in charity all that I possess to the holy brahmanas. Please get

them all together. Take leave of your friends and get our weapons ready, too."

bravimi satyena na te 'sti yantrana dhanam hi yad yan mama viprakarapat

bhavatsu samyak pratipadanena tan maya 'rjitam priti yasas karam bhavet (32.42)

First, on Rama's list of worshipful beneficiaries of his gifts was Suyajna, a son of Vasistha, the family priest.

Then came a son of the sage Agastya and a son of Visva- mitra. Then the brahmana who attended to the religious rites that Kausalya performed daily: to him was given a vehicle, servants, silken robes and much wealth. To Citraratha, the charioteer-minister, they gave jewels, garments and cattle. They now turned to the celibate students who were wholly devot- ed to the study of scriptures and who, therefore were non-earn- ing young men: to them they gave camels loaded with jewels and bullocks loaded with foodstuff. Rama distributed his own wealth to the brahmanas, young people, aged ones, and the poor. Rama requested them to take care of his as well as Laksmana's palaces during the period of their absence in the forest.

There was a lighter side to this grand ceremony. In a suburb of Ayodhya lived a brahmana named Trijata who was poor but had many children. This day his wife happened to tell him: "Though as your wife, I should not instruct you, but serve you as my god, I suggest that you throw away the axe and the hatchet that you always carry and with which you dig up roots, etc., for our food, and go to Rama. He will certainly give you some money with which to relieve our poverty." He arrived at the palace just as Rama was distributing his wealth and prayed for help. Pointing to the cows standing on the farther bank of the river Sarayu, Rama said to the brahmana: "Throw the staff you have with you, with all your strength. The number of cows that fall within the span of the staff will be yours." The emaciated and weak brahmana threw the staff with such force that it reached the farther bank of the river and fell near a bull. Rama said to him smilingly: "I was joking with you to see your strength. These thousands of cows are yours. If you desire more ask! I have earned all my wealth only for the protection of the holy ones. By giving them to you I shall be blessed. The delighted brahmana went away with the cows. There was not a single brahmana, relation, servant or poor person in Ayodhya who did not receive a share of Rama's wealth.

Rama then proceeded to Kaikeyi's palace to take leave of the king. People who had heard about the turn events had taken thronged to see Rama, Laksmana and even Sita (who could not till then be seen walking along the roads) and they said to one another: "The king is surely possessed by an evil spirit to send Rama to the forest. Like Laksmana, we, too, shall go away to the forest. Then, the forest will become a city and this city will be turned into a forest. Let Kaikeyi rule over a ruined city inhabited only by rats and snakes."

prapsyami yan adya gunan ko me svas tan pradasyati

apakramagam eva 'tah sarva kimair ahań vrpe (40)

Seeing the grief-stricken Sumantra outside the palace, Rama requested him to inform the king of his arrival. The king said to Sumantra: "First bring all my wives here quickly. I wish to see Rama only in the presence of all of them." Sumantra ran to the other apartments and urged the king's wives to rush to where the king was. Three hundred and fifty of them sur- rounded Kausalya the principle queen, and hurried with her to Kaikey's palace. When they had arrived, the king said to Sumantra: "Bring in Rama."

As Rama entered the royal presence, followed by Laksmana and Sita, the king got up and rushed forward with outstretched arms, but fell down unconscious. Moved by this heart-rending scene, all those present there wailed aloud. When the king regained consciousness, Rama said to him: "Father, I am ready to take leave of you and go to the forest: be pleased to bless me. Laksmana and Sita, too, insist on accompanying me, though I have tried my very best to dissuade them. Grant us leave to go." The king cried aloud: "Alas, I was not in my senses when I gave that boon to Kaikeyi. It is therefore proper for you to set aside my order, take me prisoner and enthrone yourself." But Rama humbly submitted: "I have no ambition for the throne, father; may you reign over the kingdom for a long, long time, so that on my return from the forest after fourteen years I may be able to bow down to your feet." At the same time, Kaikey also warned the king not to compromise on his pledge. The king said to Rama: "My beloved son, go to the forest; and may your journey be happy and pleasant. You are wedded to truth and your resolve cannot be reversed. But, please stay today and go tomorrow. Rama, I assure you that what has happened is not pleasing to me. It is the work of this woman who behaved like scorching fire hidden by cool

ashes. Yet, truth incarnate that you are, you have upheld my promise and the prestige of our dynasty."

Rama politely replied: "The good things that I can attain today--who will give me tomorrow? I choose to go away now itself. Father, one half of your promise to Kaikey has thus been fulfilled; fulfil the other half also. Let the crown pass on to Bharata. I do not desire for kingdom, nor for happiness, nor for this earth; neither for pleasures, nor even heaven, nor life: I wish to honour your word. Knowing this, pray grieve not, father. Mother Kaikeyi said: 'Go away to the forest at once, and so shall it be. This is no hardship to us. I am certain that we shall be happy in the forest among the peaceful deer, beasts and birds. You ought to console others and wipe their tears: you ought not to grieve. May steps be taken immediately to install Bharata on the throne."

The king embraced Rama: and immediately lost all consciousness.

na hy akaryatamam kimcit tava devi 'ha vidyate

patighnim tvam ahan manye kulaghnim api ca 'ntatah (35.6)

The noble charioteer-minister Sumantra who was observing all this with a deeply agitated mind, now burst forth: he thought that by insulting Kaikey! he might make her change her mind. He said: "I consider you the murderess of your husband and of your whole family; you do not seem to have a limit to your wickedness. You have cunningly set aside the time-honoured procedure of this dynasty; and that is, when the king dies his eldest son inherits the throne. Do you want your Bharata to rule Ayodhya? Then, we shall all of us leave the country, along with Rama. Abandoned by the brahmanas, relations and the holy men, what will you gain by installing your son on the throne? Alas, why does not the earth open up under your feet and swallow you? It is a wonder, too, that the distress that the sages like Vasistha feel is not transformed into a flaming rod to consume you.

"Truly you have taken after your mother. Your father had earned from a sage the faculty of understanding bird-language. One night he heard two birds talk to each others and he laughed. Your mother demanded the cause of his laughter. She would not yield even when your father told her that revealing the cause would mean his death! Upon the sage's advice, however, the king banished your mother and was at peace. Truly you have taken after

your mother and do not value your husband's life. If you do not immediately give up this wicked course, you will earn eternal ignominy." Kaikeyi paid no attention to these words!

Dasaratha then commanded Sumantra: "Let it be so. Commanded by me, let a vast army, a host of maid-servants, body-guards and also my entire treasury accompany Rama to the forest, so that he might suffer no hardship during his long sojourn there." At this, Kaikeyi sprang up in great anger and dis- pleasure: "Oh, no! this cannot be done. Bharata will not rule over an empty kingdom with an empty treasury!" Dasaratha was enraged and cried: "You did not stipulate this as a condition beforehand! Why are you countermanding my orders now?" But the inflexible Kaikeyi continued: "Your own ancestor Sagara exiled his son Asamanja, and he did not provide the son with an army, servants and wealth. Rama will go with nothing." The Prime Minister Siddhartha said: "But Asamanja was of a sadistic and wicked disposition; he killed even babies. Hence, Sagara banished him. Rama is not only faultless but is endowed with all the divine qualities. Banishing such a faultless person will deprive even Indra of his merits. Enough, queen, of all this. Let Rama rule the kingdom." The king joined his plea with the prime minister's and said: "If your heart is not changed, I shall also go away to the forest with Rama; rule the kingdom along with Bharata."

yo hi datva gaja Srestha kaksyayam kurute manah

rajju snehena kim tasya tyajatah kunjaro 'ttamam (37.3)

Rama said: "Father, I have renounced the kingdom and all the pleasures incidental to it; what shall I do with the army and the treasury? Who but a fool will, after giving up an elephant hold on to the tether? The army and the treasury WITI all be of use to Bharata. I shall be content if Mother Kaikey's servants give me the gift of coarse robes worn by ascetics who dwell in the forest." Hearing this and without the least delay, Kaikeyi herself brought coarse dresses made of the bark of trees, for Rama, Laksmana and Sita to wear. Rama humbly received his share: and then and there dressed himself in the bark-dress, discarding the princely robe. Laksmana immediately followed suit. But, Sita was both puzzled and amused with the coarse fibre dress which Kaikeyi handed her: she tried it on in different ways, but did not know how to wear it. She turned to Rama for help: and immediately Rama himself wrapped it around her body. At the same time,

the women present there lamented in irrepressible sorrow: Rama took no notice of this.

Moved to tears by the spectacle before him, the sage Vasistha said: "Wicked Kaikeyi, the cup of your sin runneth over. Is it not enough that you deceived the king, extracted the two most unrighteous boons from him and earned disgrace for the whole dynasty? Princess Sita need not and should not go to the forest. She is the very self of Rama; for the wife is the very alter ego of the husband. If both of them go away, we shall all follow them. I am sure that even Bharata and Satrughna will go. You will be the sole ruler of this deserted kingdom. You do not know Bharata; he will not consent to rule the kingdom abandoned by Rama. You have therefore acted against your own son's interest. You only asked that Rama should be exiled. Let then Sita go adorned with princely garments and jewelry." Kaikeyi ignored all this. Sita completed putting on her ascetic garments.

The people present shouted: "Shame, shame". Dasaratha, in the greatest anguish, begged of Kaikeyi: "Let at least Sita be spared this cruelty, O Kaikey. What has she done to you? You tricked me into granting you the two terrible boons, for which surely 1 deserve to perish. But even those boons do not demand this cruel treatment of Sita. You have indeed transcended all bounds of decency and righteousness; you have determined to go to hell." There was no response to this plea!

Rama stepped up now and said to Dasaratha: "Father, give us leave to go. Before going I have one prayer: and that is, kindly treat my mother with greater consideration, for she is aged and stricken with grief; let not separation from me cause her greater suffering. Heart-broken, let her not depart from this world."

na 'Srausam iti rajanam upalabdho 'pi vaksyasi

cira duhkhasya papistham iti ramas tam abravit (40.47)

Dasaratha again wailed in agony: "I must have separated many calves from cows: hence I am suffering this way now. See- ing my beloved son clad in the robes of an ascetic, why does not life leave me?" He cried: "Rama", lost consciousness, and regaining consciousness, he said to Sumantra: "Bring the best of chariots with the best of horses." The chariot arrived soon. The king commanded the treasurer; "Remember Sita will spend fourteen years

in the forest. Bring enough robes and jewelry to last that long." This was immediately done. Sita honoured her father-in-law's wishes and donned princely robes and jewelry.

Fondly embracing her, Kausalya said: "Wicked women in the world desert even their beloved husband when he is overtaken by adversity. Their heart is inconstant; and neither their family status, nor what was done, nor learning, nor the gifts received nor even the marital vows hold them back. Pray, be like the good women, and ever treat Rama as your god." Sita immediately replied: "Surely, I shall abide by your advice, mother. A vina without string is no viṇa, a cart without wheel is no cart, and a woman without husband even if she has a hundred children has no happiness here. For, her father, brother and son, give only a little happiness to a woman; but the husband gives her illimitable happiness. How then will she not worship him?"

Rama then prayed to his mother, in the same manner to continue to worship his father. Then he bowed to Kaikeyi and said: "Kindly forgive me if I have during the years that we have lived together offended you in any manner whatsoever." Hearing this, the ladies wailed aloud once again. Rama, Laksmana and Sita then went round the king and took leave of him. then they took leave of Kausalya. They then went to Sumitra (mother of Laksmana) who was delighted that her son was accompanying Rama. She blessed him and then instructed him: "Regard Rama as Dasaratha (your father) himself; treat Sita as your mother; consider the forest as Ayodhya: and go forth happily, my beloved son! The chariot was ready. When Rama mounted the chariot Su- mantra said: "The period of exile, which is fourteen years, commences this moment." The chariot moved. It moved the hearts of the people of Ayodhya who ran behind the chariot shouting "Go slow". Dasaratha and Kausalya also ran after the chariot shouting "Go slow". But Rama urged Sumantra: "Go fast. Even if you are asked later, you can say: 'I did not hear'. The pain of separation should not be prolonged." The chariot picked up speed. The ministers advised the king to return to the palace: "You should not go too far to see off one you wish to return."

raman me nugata dṛṣṭir adya 'pi na nivartate

na två pasyami kausalye sadhu mam pagina sprsa (42.34)

The people who had a last glimpse of Rama, seated on the chariot, silently taking leave of all the citizens of Ayodhya with folded palms, cried out in anguish: "Where goes our Lord who is the sole refuge and protector of the destitute, the weak and the men of austerity; and who did not lose his temper even when slighted, who tried to please even those who were angry with him, and to whom pleasure and pain were non-different? Rama who treated us, his people with the same love, devotion and reverence with which he treated his own mother where is he going? The king has surely lost all sense, to have banished such a prince." The king, too, heard what the people said, and it made him even more sad.

Stricken with grief, the people were in no mood to perform their daily tasks, mundane or religious. Even the animals were reluctant to graze or to eat. Nay, even the celestial bodies were thrown into utter confusion. Rama's departure from the city to enter the forest was marked by menacing dark clouds and dust-storms and an earthquake in Ayodhya. Dejected at the very thought that such unrighteousness could prevail in Ayodhya, people seemed to have lost all interest in life itself and in one another. Their minds and their hearts were completely absorbed in the one thought of Rama.

Dasaratha stood on the road watching the chariot dis- appear into the cloud of dust raised by itself. He craned his neck and strained his eyes in an effort to catch one more glimpse of his beloved son. When he could see no more, he fell down in a faint. Kausalya and Kaikeyi at once knelt beside him to lift him up; but the king warned Kaikeyi: "Do not touch my body, sinful woman! I do not regard you as my wife any more. I cannot even bear to look at you." Walking with the help of Kausalya, the king turned back. He looked at the ground and saw the marks left by the wheels of the chariot and the hoofs of the horses: "I see these," moaned the king, "but I do not see Rama." He continued: "Soon he will lie down to rest, on hard and bare ground, and his body will be covered with dust. Even so, Sita who is not used to forest-life will undergo untold hardship. Surely, the dwellers in the forest will behold Rama, as the helpless perceive the lord of the world." Turning to Kaikeyi he said: "I am unable to live without Rama, o Kaikeyi! I will pass away soon, and you will rule as a widow!"

Getting more and more restless, the king commanded his attendants: "I find no peace here. Take me to the palace of queen Kausalya." They conveyed him to Kausalya's palace. Lying on a couch there, he turned to Kausalya and

said: "Please touch me with your hand Kausalya; I do not see you my sight which followed Rama has not returned to me."

daivatam daivatanam ca bhutanam bhutasattamah

tasya ke hy aguna devi vane va 'py atha va pure (44.16)

Kausalya now said to the king: "I would have preferred Rama to be in Ayodhya, even as a domestic servant of Kaikeyi if she had wished that. For, now that Rama has gone to the forest, out of sight of all of us, I do not even know what is happening to him, and what she will do to him further. Kaikeyi's luck is in the ascendant; she is riding the waves: I wonder what she will do next. Will the time come when Rama and Laksmana return to Ayodhya and thus bring joy and felicity to the people of Ayodhya? How I long to behold the faces of the three children! Surely, in a past life I must have mutilated the udder of a cow and deprived the calves of their sustenance. Even as a lion overpowers a calf and thus deprives the cow of its calf, Kaikeyi has deprived me of my child."

The wise Sumitra, mother of Laksmana, who was very much more self-possessed, said to Kausalya: "He whom you regard as your son is noble and strong: and you have no need to grieve over him. By his supreme renunciation of the kingdom he has earned great merit here and hereafter. Laksmana too, has earned great merit by going away with Rama to serve him. Look at the heroic princess Sita who knowingly and bravely discarded the pleasures of the palace and has chosen to be with her husband, constantly serving him!

"I am certain that the entire nature will favourably respond to the spiritual glory and radiance of Rama. Even the gentle breeze, and a pleasantly cool moon will render service to him. The missiles and the weapons which the sage Visvamitra has bestowed upon Rama and which he has taken with him will surely provide him ample security. No enemy can face the splendour of Rama's devotion to dharma. And, he will return soon, after completing the term of ascetic life.

"Devoted to dharma as he is, he is the light in the sun, the fieriness of fire; even so he is the prosperity of wealth, and he is the very essence of glory and patience. Not only this: I consider that he is the god of gods, the foremost of what beings. Whether he lives in the forest or in the city, harm

can fall to his lot? Sita, who is goddess Laksmi herself accompanies him and he is constantly guarded by the powerful Laksmana: how can any harm touch him! Fear not. Grieve not. Soon he will return to Ayodhya. Soon your eyes will behold him. And, as you welcome him back to Ayodhya, you will shed tears, not as now, but tears of love. Wipe these tears born of grief, blessed queen Kausalya; very soon when Rama will return and bow down to you and to all your friends -- then it will be time to shed tears, tears of love."

These wise words of Sumitra, mother of Laksmana brought great solace to the queen Kausalya.

paura hy atmakṛtad duhkhad vipramok sya nṛpatmajaih

na tu khaly atmana yojya duhkhena puravasinah (46.23)

The citizens of Ayodhya who had followed Rama's chariot would not return to the city. When he noticed that the sun was about to set, Rama lovingly spoke to them once: "Blessed citizens of Ayodhya! The love and adoration which you cherish for me, may the same love and devotion be shown to Bharata, for my sake. Bharata is of noble character and noble deeds and he will do all that is calculated to be pleasing and beneficial to you. Please behave in such a way as not to cause the least distress to the heart of the king, my father, for my sake."

Whatever he did to dissuade them seemed to persuade them that he alone was fit to rule them. The brahmanas stepped forward as the spokesmen of the whole crowd: and they said, "Dear horses, do not take the chariot forward to the forest, but take your master, Rama, back to Ayodhya. This is the prayer of all beings." When Rama saw the holy brahmanas, he alighted from the chariot and walked humbly behind them, though he did not take any notice of their persuasion. The brahmanas, seeing that Rama was still proceeding towards the forest, prayed to him: "Rama, our minds were so far devoted to the Vedas; now they are following you to the forest. Once our hearts have entered into your being, there is no going back; if you do not return to Ayodhya how will dharma reign there? Don't you hear: trees which are unable to come with you, being held down by their roots pray, beg of you (by the creaking sound they produce) to return! Look at those birds: sitting motionless, they solicit you to return. Compassionate that you are, have mercy on all these created beings and return." While they were saying

so, they came to the bank of the Tamasa river -- even the river seemed to say: "Return", for it obstructed and lay across Rama's path.

Sumantra unharnessed the horses and allowed them to graze. Rama said to Laksmana: "We shall spend the night here. We need not be anxious on account of our parents: Bharata who is incarnate dharma will look after them. I am glad you came, you will be of great help in looking after Sita." After prayers, Sumantra prepared Rama's bed. Upon the bed made of leaves of trees, Rama and Sita lay down to sleep; and were soon fast asleep. Laksmana kept awake telling the glories of Rama to Sumantra. When Rama awoke, he found the citizens asleep still and said to Sumantra: "Bring the chariot quickly and we shall get away before the people awake. It is the duty of princes to save the people from unhappiness arising from the princes themselves. When the chariot was ready, Rama asked Sumantra to take the northerly direction first and then quickly switch towards the forest, in order to confuse the mind of the people, so that they may give up their pursuit and return to the city.

dhig astu khalu nidram tan yaya 'pahrta cetasab

na 'dya pasyamahe ramam pṛthüraskam mahabhujam (47.4)

yatra ramo bhayam na 'tra na 'sti tatra parabhavah (48.15)

The citizens of Ayodhya who had accompanied Rama had fallen asleep on the bank of the river Tamasa. When they woke up in the morning they found that Rama had gone away. Sore distressed, they cursed sleep: "Fie on sleep by which we were deprived of our awareness, because of which we do not see Rama now. Though he is most considerate of his devotees, how is it that Rama has abandoned us and slipped away? He used to treat us, the people of Ayodhya, as his very children; and yet he has gone away to the forest. We should all pursue him or meet with our end here itself. How can we ever face the people of Ayodhya and announce: 'We went with Rama, but we have returned without him.'"

They saw the tracks of the chariot-wheels in front of them. Rejoicing at the prospect of meeting Rama, they followed them. But when they suddenly and abruptly ended without leaving any further trace, the people were broken-hearted and puzzled. Disappointed, they had to return to Ayodhya, reconciled as they were that all this was the work of the gods. Yet, when

they re-entered their houses, they found no joy in them; grief blinded their vision and they moved about as if deprived of their vision, deprived of their very life itself.

Thenceforward, nothing made the people of Ayodhya happy. The womenfolk were literally possessed by grief and said to their husbands: "Of what use is wife, wealth, sons, pleasure and houses, to those who do not see Rama? Laksmana is indeed the only good man in the world, in as much as he has accompanied Rama. The hills, the trees, the rivers of the forest are more fortunate than we are; all of them serve Rama. Let us go to where he is: he is our only goal and refuge. Where Rama is there is no fear and there is no defeat." They also resolved; "We shall never be subject to Kaikeyi's rule. Unable to bear the separation from Rama, the king will perhaps soon die. Then perhaps Kaikeyi will rule the kingdom. In which case, we should either drink poison and die, or follow Rama, or at least go far away. Oh, how cruel that Rama, Laksmana and Sita have been banished to the forest. Surely Rama illumines the forest now -- Rama whose face is like a full moon, with strong chest and long arms, who subdues his foes, with lotus-like eyes; who speaks first to everyone, and sweetly and truthfully, too; who is strong and good, who bestows joy on the whole world like the moon, the best among men who has the prowess of an elephant."

Thus, the people of Ayodhya lamented and gave vent to their grief. Ayodhya looked like a dead city.

rajarsiṇam hi loke 'smin raty arthani mrgaya vane

kale vrtam tam manujair dhanvinam abhikanksatam (49.17)

Rama continued his journey towards the forest. To Sumantra, Rama said: "I look forward to the day when I shall return to Ayodhya and roam in the forests of the neighbourhood on the pre- text of hunting. I am not fond of hunting myself. Hunting wild animals was resorted to in days of yore for the sake of the royal sages or ascetics who lived in the forests. In course of time it became a sport for men who wielded weapons. "As the Kos- ala territory receded into the background, Rama turned towards it and with folded palms took leave of the city of Ayodhya. Turning to the villagers who crowded around him, he bade them return with the words: "It is sinful to prolong sorrow; go and apply yourselves to your allotted tasks."

At a slower pace, because he was not pursued, he drove to the bank of the holy Ganga. The holy river was flanked by many hermitages of sages. Gods (devotees of gods), demons and celestials (gandharvas' = 'artists', too), nymphs and the wives of the gandharvas, all of them worshipped the Ganga, and bathed in her waters. Turbulent and 'angry at places, placid and pleasant at others; almost still and smooth at some places and swift and noisy at others, the river provided constant delight to all. With her origin in the lotus feet of lord Visnu, the sinless river destroyed all sins.

Rama reached the town known as Srigaverapura on the bank of the Ganga. He decided to spend that night there. He saw at some distance a large ingudi tree and decided to camp under its shade. The chief of Srigaverapura was Guha who was a friend of Rama. When he heard through his men that Rama had arrived there, he rushed forward to greet him. On meeting, the two friends warmly embraced each other. Guha was mystified to see Rama clad in ascetic's garb. He had food and other delicacies immediately brought and said to Rama: "Welcome! Mighty one! The whole earth is yours. You are the Lord: we are all your humble servants. Kindly protect us and guide us. Here are four kinds of food: food that needs mastication, food that is soft, drink and delicacies that have been ground into paste. Here is food for the horses; and here again are excellent beds for your repose." Rama embraced Guha again and said: "I am delighted to see you, Guha, and to see that you are well. Thank you for your hospitality, friend: but I do not need it now. I am under a vow to lead an ascetic life. However, I only ask for food for the horses which are the favourites of my father, king Dasaratha." Guha supplied food for the horses. Rama took only the water of the river Ganga. Rama and Sita slept under the tree; while Laksmana and Guha kept awake under another tree.

na manye brahmacarye 'sti svadhite va phalo 'dayah

mardava 'rjavayor va 'pi tvam ced vyasanam agatam (52.17)

Guha said to Laksmana: "We are used to life in the forest, O brother; you are not. Here is a bed for you. Lie down and sleep. I shall keep awake and guard all of you." But Laksmana declined, saying: "It is even as you say. Yet, I shall not lie down in the presence of my brother." As they both sat there vigilantly guarding Rama and STt&, Laksmana expressed his anguish to Guha: "This night is perhaps the doom of Ayodhya. Possibly our father

has passed away. Possibly our mothers, too. And, the people are sunk in grief. Our only prayer is that the fourteen years may pass by soon, and Rama may return to Ayodhya."

At dawn, Rama woke up and offered his prayers. To Guha he said: "Please arrange to have us ferried across the river Ganga." When the boat was ready, he said to Sumantra: "I think you have return with the come far enough, Sumantra: now you should chariot to Ayodhya." Sumantra could not even endure the thought for a moment. He cried bitterly: "How can I go back without you, Rama? The life of brahmacarya and the study of the Vedas, the cultivation of virtues like kindness and truthfulness All these appear to me fruitless, when I think that you can suffer this exile. Nay, permit me to be with you. If you refuse to Let me come with you, I shall burn myself, chariot and every- thing.

Rama, however, spoke gently to the grieving Sumantra: "Sumantra, you are the only true well-wisher of our family. You are our wise counsellor. Hence you should return to Ayodhya and console the king with this message from me Neither myself nor Laksmana are sorry that we have left Ayodhya and are to live in the forest'. Please behave towards the king in such a manner as not to cause the least displeasure. Kindly convey a message to Bharata: Treat all our mothers with equal love and reverence. It is important that you should return to Ayodhya, Sumantra. Only when mother Kaikeyi! sees that you have returned to the city without me will she be convinced that I have gone to the forest. And, when Bharata is crowned, her heart's desires would have been fulfilled. For my sake, Sumantra, please return to Ayodhya.

To Guha, Rama said: "Under the vow of asceticism, I shall not stay in inhabited forests. Let me depart." And before doing so, he obtained the milk that exudes from the banyan tree and matted his hair in the style of ascetics. Taking leave of Guha, Rama asked Laksmana to get into the boat first, then help Sita to enter, and last of all he himself entered the boat. From then onwards this was the order in which they marched. Sits offered a prayer to Ganga for their safe sojourn in the forest and safe return to Ayodhya. On reaching the other bank of Ganga, in the Vatsa country, Rama and Laksmana killed four deer (or animals) -- varaha, rsya, prsata and maharuru --which together with some herbs, made their meal.

artha dharmau parityajya yah kamam anuvartate

evam padyate ksipram raja dasaratho yatha (53.13)

That night they spent without Sumantra, the first night alone during their exile. Thoughts of Ayodhya entered Rama's mind. He said to Laksmana: This is our first night without Sumantra, I wonder what is happening in Ayodhya. Surely. our father is tormented by grief. Perhaps, Kaikeyt is happily asleep. If Bharata has returned to Ayodhya, maybe she might even take the king's life. Looking back at the events of the past few days, I begin to think that sensual pleasure is more powerful than wealth and dharma. Otherwise, how can the king banish his own son who has given no cause for offence? Yet. again, he who ignores his prosperity and dharma and devotes himself to sensual pleasures comes to grief soon.even as king Dasaratha has. Tonight I am thinking of the fate of our mothers. Surely, they are the hardest hit by this turn of events, and their grief is the worst. In her previous birth, my mother must have deprived mothers of their children; that is why she has to undergo this suffering now. Kausalya's suffering is intolerable and great, I am really concerned on her behalf. Please return to Ayodhya and look after our mothers; in the forest, I shall surely be able to take care of Sita. Laksmana's reply was em- phatic and final: "Ayodhya has surely been deprived of its 1ight, in that you have come away. There is no use worrying over that, Rama. But I w111 on no account leave you and return to Ayodhya." Rama accepted this; and from that moment onwards. they were three!

After spending the night under the big tree on a bed of grass prepared by Laksmana: Rama. Stta and Laksmana moved on. Soon they came to the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. Rama noticed smoke rising at a distance and gladly announced: "Laksmana, see, that is a clear indication that the sage Bharadvaja is in his hermitage, tending the sacred fire."

Bharadvaja welcomed them heartily. I have been expecting you to come. I have heard of the happenings in Ayodhya. This is a lovely place. You can spend the entire period of your exile here." But Rama replied: "Certainly, this place is beautiful and holy. But, it is too close to the big cities, and the people of Ayodhya, Kosala and other territories might often come here to see me or to see Sita. Hence I feel we should not settle down here. Kindly suggest some other place." Conceding this argument, Bharadvaja further said: "At some distance from here is the sacred Citrakoota hill. One who looks at the summits of that hill enjoys prosperity and never falls into error.

It is the abode of many sages. Take up your abode there." Rama agreed to this proposal.

upavṛtte munau tasmin ramo laksmanam abravit

krtapunyah sma saumitre munir yan no 'nukampate (55.11)

The sage Bharadvaja who frequented the Citrakoota hill, instructed Rama in great detail on the way to reach there. He also offered special prayers for the safety of the three and for the success of their mission. Rama bowed to the sage and said: "I shall follow your directions." He turned to Laksmana and said: "Surely, we have earned a lot of merit in the past to deserve such affection from the sage.

They set about first to cross the river Yamuna. For this they had to prepare a raft with their own hands. They helped Sita get on the raft and then Jumped onto it. While they were in mid-stream. STt offered prayers to goddess Yamuna so that they could safely conclude their exile in fourteen years and return to Ayodhya. On reaching the farther bank they left the raft and found the landmark that the sage had mentioned a banyan tree. As instructed by the sage, sita offered prayers at the banyan tree, too.

They marched forward: Laksmana leading the way, sita following him, and Rama following STE. Whenever S1t saw a lovely bush of wild flowers, she questioned Rama about them: and often Laksmana would gather and present her with a bouquet of wild flowers. After walking in this manner for some time. they again chose a large tree to spend the night under.

And, again, at dawn Rama awoke and then awakened Laksmana: "Listen to the sweet music of the birds, Laksmana: night has passed and it is time to make a move. After their morning bath In the river Yamuna and prayers, they walked on towards Citra- koota. All along the way, Rama kept pointing out to Sita the beautiful flora and fauna of the forest. When they neared the Citrakoota hill, he pointed it out to Sita and to Laksmapa: he announced joyously that there they would spend their exile sporting happily in the forest. Rama said to Laksmana: "It is a delightful hill, Laksmana, with a variety of trees and creepers, and with plenty of fruits and roots. It thrills my very soul. And, many sages and holy men live here. I think we should live here."

They entered the hermitage of the sage Valmiki who warmly welcomed them. At the command of Rama, Laksmana erected a hut in no time, with timber and thatch. Immediately thereafter, they performed the ceremony for the consecration of their hermitage. In order to prevent evil spirits haunting the newly constructed place and to ensure that the dwelling had the most sublime and spiritual atmosphere. Entering that hut afterwards, Rama felt completely relieved of the unhappiness caused by the events of the preceding days.

kim samartham Janasya 'sya kim priyani kim sukhavaham

iti ramena nagaram pitrvat paripalitam (57.14)

As Sumantra drove the empty chariot into the city, the people walled aloud once again, knowing that Rama had indeed gone away. They despaired of ever seeing him again. They said: Rama's one all-absorbing thought always was: What is accept- able to the people, what is pleasing to them, and what will bring them happiness, and he treated us Like his own children As he entered the palace, the consorts of the King expressed their grief once again: Returning without Rama, in what manner can Sumantra console the queen Kausalya? Looking at the fate of Kausalya, we conclude that it is as hard to give up one's life as it is to live it when assailed by misfortune."

When Sumantra entered the presence of the king and convey- ed Rama's salutations to him, the latter fainted anew. But, queen Kausalya reassured him that he need have no reservations as Kaikey was not present there. Recovering consciousness, the king then bade Sumantra relate all the events and Rama's messages in detail. His voice choked with tears, the king asked Sumantra: "How was it possible for Rama, Laksmana and Sita, of royal descent, accustomed to being waited upon by servants and servant-maids, and to regal life in the palace, to adapt them- selves to the hard life of ascetics? Sumantra, kindly tell me how Rama sits, hunts, eats and lives now?"

After narrating the progress of the march of the three, Sumantra conveyed Rama's messages. Firstly, Rama wished that the venerable king's feet should be worshipped. Secondly, Rama had this message for queen Kausalya: "Be devoted to dharma. Maintain the sacred fire. Worship the feet of our lord the king considering him as god. In your relations with my other mothers, let not pride nor a false sense of dignity enter; and this even more so in the

case of Kaikeyf of whom the king is especially fond. Regard Bharata as king: for though young in age, kings should be respected. This is political dharma." Rama's message to Bharata specially concerned his attitude to the mothers: "Please regard queen Kausaly as your own mother: she loves me dearly and is sure to feel my absence greatly." Sumantra said: "As he uttered these words, Rama's eyes rained tears of grief."

Sumantra continued: "Laksmana, however, was full of wrath. He was still bitterly against the banishment of Rama; and asked, 'How can he who banishes Rama be considered a father? How can he who exiled Rama against the wishes of the people be considered king?' Sita, however, was tongue-tied and her tearful face was turned all the time to Rama,when he and Laksmana spoke to me."

na mitrapan na mitragam udasina janasya ca

aham artataya kimcid viseşan upalaksaye (59.14)

Sumantra continued: "After taking leave of Rama, I turned back towards Ayodhya. But my horses were unwilling to return without Rama. So, I spent a couple of days with Guha. I hoped that Rama would send for me to join him. But he did not. My heart laden with grief, I drove towards Ayodhya. But, o king. Ayodhya without Rama is a body without soul. I found that the rivers, the groves and the forests, as also the living beings on the earth, in the sky and in the water all behaved as if they were lifeless. As I drove through Ayodhya, no one greeted me nor smiled at me. When they saw the empty chariot, people began to cover their faces and their eyes and cry.In this there was total unanimity: whether they were friendly, unfriendly or Indifferent to Rama, they all were grief-stricken,"

Dasaratha wailed again: "Alas, I committed the greatest blunder of my life and reign. I acted impulsively to please my wife, whereas I should have taken the counsel of my preceptors and my ministers. If I had taken their counsel, this calamity might have been averted. Maybe it is the will of the gods. O Rama, O Laksmana, O Sita! You do not know that I am dying of intense anguish, as a destitute and orphan. O Sumantra, will you not take me to where my beloved Rama is?"

Looking at Kausalya, the king described the ocean of grief in which he was sunk, in graphic terms. And while doing so, unable to bear the grief, he

fainted again. Seeing this Kausalya was terror-stricken and fell down. Looking at Sumantra, Kausalya said: "Sumantra, kindly take me immediately to where Rama and Laksmana are. I cannot live here without them even for a moment."

The wise Sumantra calmly addressed the queen now: "Queen. please give up your sorrow, your delusion and the confusion caused by your unhappiness. Rama has given up mental anguish and he will surely live in the forest without the least sorrow. Even so, Laksmana devoted as he is to Rama and to his service, is earning great religious merit. Sita's heart is wholly ab- sorbed in Rama. In fact, in the company of Rama, she has begun to feel that she is sporting in a grove just outside Ayodhya : and she does not feel the sorrow of exile at all. Therefore, even her physical body does not show signs of fatigue or the effects of inclement weather and the discomfort of forest life. She appears to be just the same celestial person that she was here. Oh, no, they do not deserve our grief, nor do you nor even the king deserve to be grieved for: whatever is happening now will be remembered by humanity for all time to come."

Soko nasayate dhairyam Soko nasayate Srutam

soko nasayate sarvam na 'sti Sokasamo ripuh (62.15)

Stricken with great grief, the queen Kausalya said thus to her husband: "You are indeed a glorious and righteous king: you are full of love and kindness. Yet, you failed to reflect for a moment on how your own sons and Sita, your daughter-in-law. would be able to live in the forest. They were brought up in palaces; they have to live in a hut. They are accustomed to rich food; they have to live on ascetic fare. Their ears are used to listening to sweet music; they have to listen daily to the howling and roaring of wild animals in the forest. How could you expect Rama who used to repose on soft beds, to sleep on grass mats, using his own arm as his pillow? Alas, I pity my own granite heart which is not shattered to a thousand pieces at the very thought of Rama's exile to the forest. Alas, you are guilty of a great cruelty to Rama in that you banished him from the kingdom. I doubt if even after the fourteen years of exile, Rama will ascend to the throne. It is common knowledge that the brahmanas will not eat the remnants of food given already to others; the pious people regard articles once used as unfit to be used again in a sacred rite. How, then, do you think that Rama will accept the throne wrested from

him. used by someone else, and then returned to him? Such a truthful son has been unjustly banished by you to the forest: it is hard to believe that you know what dharma means. Alas, I have been deprived of all support. It is said that the husband is a woman's first support, the second is her son, the third her, relations and she has no fourth support. Nay, by this unrighteous action, you have destroyed the kingdom, the people and the ministers, me and my son."

Hearing these harsh words, Dasaratha fell into a swoon again, uttering: "Rama".

Stricken with grief, the king on regaining consciousness, folded his palms and said to Kausalya: "Kausalya, be pleased with me. Kindly do not utter harsh words to me." Full of remorse, Kausalya drew Dasaratha's folded palms towards her head, placed them on her head, and said to him: "Bless me, lord. I am guilty, unforgivably guilty. That woman whose action forces her husband to bow to her is not praiseworthy either here or hereafter. Even though I know the course of dharma, I was temporarily robbed of my wits by great grief. Grief destroys and hence I said what I should not have said. courage, the wisdom that has been heard, and in fact every- thing: hence there is no enemy greater than grief. These five days without Rama have been like five years to me; and this grief, therefore, built up to a climax. Terrible is this grief."

guru laghavam arthanam arambhe karmagam phalam

dosad va yo na janati sa bala iti ho 'cyate (7)

It was the sixth night after Rama's departure to the forest. After his conversation with Kausalys, the king slept for a while. He woke up at midnight and remembered his own past evil deed. And he narrated the following story to Kausalya:

"Whatever a man does whether it is good or evil the fruit of that action he gains. He who does not realise the grave or light consequences of his own deeds at the very beginning he Indeed is Temature and childish.What I am about to tell you happened before we were married when I was a young prince. I had learnt the art of shooting without seeing the target, with the help of sound emanating from the target.

"I had gone to the forest hunting. The sun had set. Night had fallen. I drove towards the bank of the river Saraya. wanted to bag a big buffalo or an elephant that night. It was dark; and in the silence of the forest I could hear what I thought was a sound made by an elephant. I could not see the elephant, but the sound was enough for me. I took aim and shot.

"At dawn I heard, again in the direction from which the sound had come. a human voice wailing terribly in agony: 'Who could have been interested in taking the life of an innocent ascetic? To whom have I caused the least offence? 1 came to this lonely place on the bank of the river. to fetch water to quench the thirst of my parents: and lo, I have been shot, and fatally wounded. The murderer can gain nothing by this evil action, but he will only reap evil fruits. I am not worried so much about the loss of my own life as about the future of my blind parents who are totally dependent upon me, and who have been looked after by me. Surely, when they know I am dead, they will give up their lives too. He is surely a fool who has by a foolish action brought about this triple murder."

"Hearing this, I rushed to the scene. A young ascetic had been hit by me. He was filling his pot with water; and the sound made by water entering the pot had been mistaken by me as sound made by an elephant. I knelt penitently at his feet. He gazed at me with eyes afire with austerities and said: 'Go quickly to where my father is and seek his pardon; otherwise his wrath might destroy you. That path over there will lead you to where my parents live. Before you go, relieve me of this pain, by drawing out the missile lodged in my body, which is causing me great pain. Do not be afraid that you will thereby cause the death of a brahmana; for I was born of a vaisya-father and 40dra-woman. To relieve his distress I pulled the missile out; and in a moment he was dead."

gatis tvam agatinam ca caksus tvam hina caksuṣa

samasakttas tvayi pranah kim tvam no na 'bhibhasase (10)

King Dasaratha continued to narrate the story:

"Having committed the terrible deed, I reflected how best I could atone for it. Taking the path indicated by the dying youngster, I soon reached the hermitage occupied by the blind old couple. When the father heard my footsteps, he said: 'My beloved son, why have you taken so long to fetch

water? You are succour to the helpless, eyes to the blind, all our life- forces are centred in you: why don't you talk to me? My son, If either i or your mother has given you offence, do not take it to heart: you are an ascetic, are you not?' Anxiety, fear, and remorse filled my heart. Struggling to give expression to what I felt at that moment, I said: 'Holy sir, I am not your son. I am a prince named Dasaratha. As a result of a sinful and ignorant action of mine, your son was fatally wounded by me. I am guilty of killing your son. Please command what 1 should do now."

"Stupefied by grief, the aged ascetic replied: 'If you had yourself not come to me and confessed your wicked deed, your head would have broken into a million pieces. Moreover as you say, you committed this sin in ignorance, not knowingly. Other- wise, your whole family would have been destroyed. Now, take us to the place where our beloved son lies dead."

"Thereupon, 1 led the aged blind couple to the place where the young ascetic lay dead. The old man touched the body of the son and wailed in terrible and heart-rending anguish.. 'Who will attend to our needs as you did, beloved son?' wailed the old man, and recounted all that the young man used to do for him. He continued: 'Wait, my son: for soon we shall also follow you to the abode of death and there we shall pray to the god of death to bless us that you may continue to be with us and to serve us. May you be merged in the supreme being which is the goal of holy ones! He then performed the funeral rites of his son whose spirit ascended to heaven. The father then said to me: 'Before I go, I have to pronounce this curse on you: since you brought about this grief born of separation from my son, you will also die of grief born of separation from your son. Immediately he and his aged wife consigned themselves to the burning pyre, to enjoy the company of their son in heaven.

"I am suffering the fruits of that sin, Kausalya."

Soon the king lost his sensations. "The grief caused by separation from my son is drying my life-forces, "said the king. "O Rama, have you really gone away? O Kausalya, O Sumitra, i cannot see anyone." Wailing thus, the king lost consciousness.

taila dronyam atha matyah samvesya Jagatipatim

rajñah sarvany atha 'distas cakruh karmany anantaram (66.14)

The next morning, the king's attendants gathered in the palace to awaken him with the usual music, panegyrics and benedictory verses from the scriptures. It was almost sunrise. The birds awoke hearing all this, but not the king, nor even the two queens Kausalya and Sumitra who were sleeping on the same couch.

The other consorts of the king thereupon entered the royal chamber and gently rocked the couch, in an effort to awaken the king and the queens. Even this did not do the trick. Upon their closer examination, they discovered that the king was not breathing. Seized with terror, they began to wail aloud. Hearing this lamentation, Kausalya and Sumitra, too, awoke. By the very fact that the queens were sleeping on the same couch with the king, they all concluded that the king had passed away in sleep. The lamentation of the queens was truly heart-rending. Kausalya and Sumitra uttered a loud cry 'O Lord' and fell down on the ground. The resplendent queens had lost all their lustre, now that they had lost their husband. There was uncontrollable and inconsolable weeping and wailing in the palace.

In uncontrollable and inconsolable grief and anguish, Kausalya, looking at Kaikeyi who was also grief-stricken, gave vent to her bitter feelings: "Are you satisfied now, O Kaikeyi! You are the cause of the king's death. Now you have no more enemies: enjoy the sovereignty of the kingdom. How can a chaste woman survive the death of her husband? And yet in your greed, you have actually brought about his death as well as the destruction of our whole dynasty. You have brought misery and grief to king Janaka, to Sita and to the whole family. Stricken with grief at what has been done to his daughters, king Janaka will surely perish. And Sumitra and myself cannot survive the death of our husband."

The officials of the royal household, when they discovered the king's demise, prepared for what had to be done. They embalmed the king's body in a trough of oil and made the necessary preparations for the royal funeral. The funeral it- self could not take place without the presence of the king's son; hence the embalming was resorted to. Looking at the embalmed body of the king Dasaratha, the widowed consorts lamented again and again at the cruelty of their fate -- out of grief for the loss of their husband, and out of fear of what greater harm Kaikeyi had in store for them. They and the people of Ayodhya were unanimous in their condemnation of Kaikeyi whose cruel act alone brought about the death of the king.

na 'rajake janapade svakam bhavati kasyacit

matsya iva nara nityam bhaksayanti parasparam (67.31)

The next morning, the ministers of state as also the counsellors and sages assembled under the presidency of the sage Vasistha to deliberate on the immediate course of action. The ministers submitted to the assembly: "Unable to bear separation from his sons, Rama and Laksmana, king Dasaratha has ascended to heaven. Of his sons, Rama and Laksmana have gone to the forest; and Bharata and Satrughna are in their uncle's house in the kingdom of the Kekayas. A king should immediately be nominated; for without a king, the kingdom will be destroyed. The evils of anarchy are well known to you all: the people of the kingdom cannot carry on their sacred and mundane affairs in peace, and neither righteousness nor normal trade and enjoy- ment of righteous pleasures is possible. Thieves and knaves will thrive; and wicked people will take the law into their own hands and assume the authority of rulers. All progress will be arrested, and no constructive activity will be undertaken. Law and order will come to an end. Justice will not prevail. Morality will be ignored. Neither religious rites nor public entertainment will take place. There will be fear and anxiety in the hearts of all people. In fact, even ascetics and sages will be reluctant to move about freely. When anarchy rules, no one can call anything his own; just as the big fish eats the small ones, the strong people will swallow the weak ones. What the eyes are to the body, the king is to the country. Embodying in himself virtue and nobility, the king is verily the father and mother of a kingdom. O sage Vasistha, pray decide what should be done now."

Vasistha said: "Bharata has already been nominated king. He is now in his uncle's house. Let swift messengers be despatched immediately to bring him back." The ministers and the counsellors heartily agreed to this proposal. Vasistha thereupon called upon a few chosen messengers to proceed immediately to Kekaya territory and to convey the following message to Bharata: "Greetings to you, O Bharata; the sages in Ayodhya request you to return to that city at once, for an important task awaits you." Vasistha however warned them: "Do not tell Bharata of Rama's exile nor of the king's death, nor of the misfortune suffered by the great dynasty.

The messengers left Ayodhya almost immediately. Crossing the river Ganga at Hastinapura, they rode farther west. They passed through Kurujangala

and Pancala territories. They crossed the Iksumati river, went over the Sudama mountain, to the Bahlika kingdom (Balkh), crossed the Vipasa (Beas) river and other rivers and soon reached the city of Girivraja, the capital of the Kekaya kingdom.

naro yanena yah svapne khara yukttena yati hi

acirat tasya dhumagram citayam sampradṛsyate (69.18)

Elsewhere, during the closing hours of that same night Bharata had a nightmare. As a consequence, the next day he was in no mood to enjoy himself. Seeing him depressed, his companions endeavoured their very best to distract him by sur- rounding him with music, dance and drama, fun and laughter; but Bharata did not pay much attention to these, absorbed as he was in brooding over his dream. When his friends questioned him, he narrated the essentials of his dream to them:

"Last night I had a most terrible dream. I saw my father falling down from a mountain peak into a pool of cow-dung. I saw him drink oil from his palms cupped as a receptacle. I also saw that the oceans had become dry; the moon had dropped onto earth; and everywhere the demons ruled. I saw the tusk of the royal elephant broken. I saw fierce fires instantly extinguished. Dark young women were hitting the king who was seated on an iron seat. The king, wearing crimson flowers, was driven in a southerly direction in a chariot borne by donkeys. An ugly demoness was laughing at the king. Such is the dream I saw last night, during the last quarter. Either the king, or I, or Rama or Laksmana will die. For, it is said that he who dreams of a chariot driven by donkeys will see the Smoke rising from a Having seen this ugly dream, I feel apprehensive. Though I see no immediate cause to fear, yet there is great fear in my heart. Hence I am unable to enjoy what would other- wise delight me.

At about the same time the messengers arrived from Ayodhya. They quickly sought Bharata's presence and conveyed to him the message entrusted to them. Bharata for his part enquired in detail about the king, Rama, Laksmana, his mothers etc. To this enquiry the messengers gave an ambiguous and diplomatic answer: "All of them whose welfare you seek are well, O Bharata. goddess of fortune is in your favour. Let there be no delay in your departure."

Bharata then sought the permission of his maternal grand- father who not only gave him permission, but loaded him with presents (in return for the costly presents which the messengers from Ayodhya had brought for the old man and his son, i.e. Bharata's uncle). But, Bharata was not made any happier by all the love, the affection and the costly presents bestowed upon him. In his heart there was an irrational fear, caused by the previous night's dream, and the mysterious haste displayed by the messengers from Ayodhya.

When everything was ready, Bharata went into the inner apartments and took leave of his grandfather and his uncle. Accompanied by Satrughna, the noble Bharata then ascended the chariot which sped towards Ayodhya, escorted by a contingent of the Kekaya army.

tvaya tv idanim dharmajña rajatvam avalambyatam

tvatkṛte hi maya sarvam idam evam vidham kṛtam (72.53)

From Girivraja (or Rajagriha), Bharata drove towards Ayodhya, crossing the rivers Sudama, Hradini, Satadru (Sutlej) and Ailadhana; through the Aparaparvata territory, Salyakarsana and the Mahaŝaila hills: crossing the rivers Sarasvati and Ganga, passing through the Viramatsya territory; later he crossed the Yamuna and once again Ganga at Pragvata and on the seventh evening he reached Ayodhya.

On entering Ayodhya, Bharata was distressed to see the vast change. The city was in mourning. Nothing seemed to be right; there was no joy, no cheer, no auspicious sign anywhere. He questioned the charioteer: "Why is this so? I have heard of what a city looks like when the king is dead; and I see such scenes in Ayodhya!"

He went straight to his father's apartment in the palace. Not finding him there, and mentally disturbed, he rushed to his own mother's apartment. There he saw his mother eagerly waiting for him. She rushed forward and with great joy embraced him and welcomed him. She questioned him about the travel; and he gave her a complete account of it. She enquired about her father and her brother; and he replied to her that they were well. Then he asked: "Where is father? He used to be in your apartment most of the time, reclining on that golden couch. I wish to bow down to him and touch his feet. Where is he?" Kaikey who was mentally unbalanced by greed, now

told him (who did not know anything) what she knew (the news that shocked him) as if it were something very pleasant. "Your father has gone to where everyone ultimately goes to the other world," she said calmly. It struck Bharata like a thunderbolt and he fell down weeping. She tried to console him with the words: "Get up, pick yourself up, O king! Why are you lying down on the floor like this? People like you who are accepted by respectable society do not grieve like this!"

"I came hurriedly, thinking that the invitation meant either Rama's coronation or the king's performance of a sacred I do not see my father. Mother, tell me: what rite. Alas! were father's last words?" Bharata asked. Kaikeyi replied: "He left his body wailing aloud the names of Rama, Laksmana, and Sita, and said: 'Only they who are able to see them on their return from the forest are blessed." Even more shocked, Bharata asked: "Where is Rama?" Kaikeyi replied: "He, with Laksmana and Sita, have gone to the forest." Deeply agitated, Bharatá asked again: "For what crime has Rama been exiled from the kingdom?" In answer to this vital question Kaikeyi narrated the whole story, and added: "My son, you know dharma, and you should now take the reins of the kingdom in your hands. It was for your sake, dear son, that I did all this. Do not grieve, do not worry, this kingdom is now dependent upon you. Perform the last rites of your father without delay and ascend the throne.

matṛ rupe mama 'mitre nṛsamse rajya kamuke

na te 'ham abhibhasyo 'smi durvṛtte patighatini (74.7)

Kaikey's dreadful revelation of the truth sent her own son Bharata into a fit of uncontrollable rage, born of unutterable grief. He said: "What have I to do with the kingdom, grief-stricken as I am having been deprived of my father and my brother who is like a father to me? You have heaped upon me sorrow upon sorrow, by causing the death of my father and by having my brother sent to the forest. You are the exterminator of our dynasty. And, you say that you did all this for my sake. Surely, blinded by greed for political power, you failed to see in what love and reverence I hold Rama. How can I take over the reins of government that he and he alone can hold? Remember, even if by some psychic or intellectual power I gain the ability to govern the country, yet, I will not ascend the throne; for will never fulfil your wicked desire. In our dynasty it has always been that the eldest son

ascended the throne. That noble tradition has been destroyed by you. However, I will not let that happen. I shall go to the forest, persuade Rama to return to Ayodhya, and either live in the forest as his substitute or come here and function as his servant.

"For this unpardonable sin, you deserve to go to hell. From now you have forfeited your right to speak to me. You who appear to be my mother, are in fact my enemy; you who are of despicable conduct, Full of political greed, and killer of your own husband. You are unfit to call yourself the daughter of the noble king Asvapati, my grandfather. You have earned eternal disrepute. What terrible hardships you have brought on mother Kausalya! Don't you know that a son is born of every limb of oneself, and of one's own heart, and hence the most beloved of the mother? And, yet, incarnate cruelty that you are, you have deprived mother Kausalya of her son. I have heard the following legend: Indra once saw the divine cow Surabhi weeping. When questioned by him Surabhi pointed to two bullocks which had fallen into a swoon on account of overwork, and said: 'Indra, I grieve to see my two sons lying in a swoon, because a thoughtless and wicked agriculturist who had yoked them to his plough has treated them with cruelty and merciless greed. Seeing my children thus overburdened with heavy loads and worked to exhaustion and great pain, I am filled with sorrow: there is no one who is as beloved as a son.' What immeasurable pain has been caused by you in the heart of mother Kausalya! I cannot even endure the very thought of the great sin committed by you. You may enter the fire, or go to the forest, or hang yourself: or do what you like. I have resolved to go to the forest and bring Rama back to the kingdom." Greatly shaken by the grief, Bharata fell down unconscious.

so 'matya madhye bharato jananim abhyakutsayat

rajyam na kamaye jatu mantraye na 'pi mataram (75.2)

The ministers had gathered around Bharata in the mean- time. Regaining consciousness, Bharata said: "I never desired the throne; nor did I advise the mother in this regard.

Hearing Bharata's voice, Kausalya went to meet him; and at the same time Bharata, too, sought her presence. Bharata and Satrughna saw that she had fainted on account of grief and caught hold of her feet. When she regained consciousness, she said to Bharata: "The kingdom is yours, Bharata, won

for you by your mother.. Great sorrow is mine. It would be better for me to go away to the forest where Rama is." Folding his palms in salutation, Bharata humbly and tearfully said to her: "Mother, do you not know me, and my love for Rama? Why then do you utter such harsh words? No, Rama's exile is not my doing; in fact, I did not even know about it. I say on oath: if I am guilty of that offence let me suffer the fruits of all the sins mentioned in our scriptures. Let him who was responsible for Rama's exile incur the sin of kicking a cow, of a master robbing his servant, of treason, of tyranny, of war crimes, of showing disrespect to elders, of betraying a friend, of blackmailing, of eating food without sharing with family and servants, of sleeping at dawn and at dusk, of arson, of adultery, of neglect of service of parents, of polluting water, of poisoning another, and of showing partiality while witnessing a dispute. Let him become slothful and inactive, ungrateful, shunned by all and hated. Let him be the abode of all the vices condemned in our scriptures: and let every kind of inauspiciousness and misfortune fall to his lot."

Kausalya was deeply moved by Bharata's speech. Lovingly she said to him: "Child, enough: to one aggrieved by the loss of a son, you are adding your own grief. Luckily your heart has not swerved from the path of dharma; my child, you are devoted to truth and unto the divine realms you will ascend." She placed Bharata on her lap and consoled him.

The next morning, the sage Vasistha said to Bharata "Enough of this grief, Bharata: let the funeral rites proceed." The king's body was taken out of the trough of oil. Bharata once again gave vent to his grief and lamented near the king's body. Vasistha once again said: "The king's funeral rites should be performed with a cool mind and without mental agitation." Thereupon the priests brought out the sacred fire which the king himself had diligently maintained in his house and with which his own funeral pyre would be kindled. When the funeral pyre was set ablaze, there were heart-rending cries by the women of the palace.

gatir yah sarva bhutanaṁ duhkhe kim punar atmanah

sa ramah sattva sampannah striya pravrajito vanam (78.2)

On the eleventh day, Bharata performed the necessary purificatory ceremony; on the twelfth he performed the ap- propriate ceremony for the peace of the departed soul, at which he distributed lavish gifts to the

brahmanas and the poor. On the morning of the thirteenth day, once again Bharata lamented the king when he went to the cremation ground in order to collect the ashes. Weeping uncontrollably, Bharata fell down unconscious. Satrughna, too, fell down unconscious. When he regained consciousness, Satrughna wailed aloud: "The ocean of grief generated by the wicked Manthara, which took

the shape of the two boons granted by my father, and which was infested with the crocodiles of Kaikeyt's greed, has swallowed us. Our beloved father used to look after us with great af- fection and love, and provided all our needs. Who will care for us now?" Hearing the two brothers lament like this, all the people of the palace also gave vent to their sorrow.

Seeing this, the sage Vasistha said to Bharata: "This is the thirteenth day; and the ceremonies connected with the funeral have to be done today. These three pairs of opposites (birth and death, joy and sorrow, gain and loss) are inevit- able in the life of all beings: therefore, you should not behave like this." Hearing the admonition of the sage, the two princes got up and continued the rites connected with the thirteenth day of the mourning.

Later, Satrughna said to Bharata: "Rama indeed is the refuge of all beings in their sorrow: that Rama who is endowed with all auspicious qualities has been exiled to the forest by a woman! What is even more strange is that the mighty Laksmana tolerated all that happened and did not stop our father from committing this terrible injustice." Just as Satrughna was saying this, the hunchbacked Manthara entered the apartment. "This sinful woman is responsible for the whole tragedy," said Bharata and handing her over to Satrughna: "Mete out the punishment she deserves." All her friends vanished from the apartment when Satrughna grabbed Manthara: they fled to the apartment of Kausalya, for asylum! Unable to face Satrughna's rage and rebuke, Kaikey sought her son's asylum! Thereupon Bharata said to Satrughna: "Let us not kill these women, brother. I would myself have killed this sinful Kaikey, but for fear of thus offending the righteous and noble Rama who may not approve of such action. Even if we kill this hunchback he would be dis- pleased with us. Therefore, leave her alone."

Released from the grip of Satrughna, Manthara fled to the company of Kaikey who tried to console her.

na sakamam karişyami svam imam matṛgandhinim

vane vatsyamy aham durge ramo raja bhavisyati (79.12)

The privy counsellors assembled together on the fourteenth day after the passing of king Dasaratha and said to Bharata: "Dasaratha is no more, and he sent Rama and Laksmana to the forest. Pray, be our king. There is no fault in this, as you have been nominated to the throne. Our kingdom is without a ruler, and that is not desirable." The articles needed for the coronation had already been made ready; and Bharata saw the people who had brought all these articles. With bowed head and joined palms, he went round these articles as a mark of veneration, and then spoke to the counsellors: "Men of culture and wisdom that you are, you should not make such a suggestion to me. Indeed, Rama who is our elder brother shall be king. In his stead, I shall go to the forest and dwell there for fourteen years. Please get ready a contingent of our army with all the paraphernalia. I shall proceed to the forest, seek Rama wherever he is, perform the installation ceremony there in the forest itself, and make him return to Ayodhya. I shall in no cir- cumstances fulfil the sinful desire of my so-called mother; I shall dwell in the forest, and Rama will be king. Therefore, let our architects, engineers and workers proceed ahead, cutting a proper pathway for all of us to go to the forest."

The counsellors and others who heard this commendable decision of Bharata heartily approved of it and blessed him. And this in turn delighted the heart of Bharata. Engineers, artisans, architects and others had immediately been despatched to prepare the way for the army and other regalia to go to the forest.

This party consisted of geologists, wiremen, machinemen, architects, mechanical engineers, civil engineers, carpenters, water diviners, builders of bridges and tunnels, in addition to cooks, shoe-makers and domestic aids. These, along with the contingent of armed forces, appeared to be an ocean of humanity on the move. With lightning speed, they laid roads, levelled prominences, filled pits and potholes, planted trees where necessary, cut them down where they obstructed the path, dug wells, constructed dams and thus created lakes, and thus laid a first-class highway in no time, as it were. As they marched forward, they pitched their tents which were as numerous These camps had their own as the stars in the firmament. temples for worship and the performance of the religious rites, even during the march.

Built by experts, the highway looked extremely attractive and it was soon ready for use.

ramam eva 'nugacchami sa raja dvipadam varah

trayanam api lokanam rajyam arhati raghavah (82.16)

The next day, the palace officials who did not know of Bharata's decision were getting ready for the ceremonies connected with Bharata's coronation. The court musicians and panegyrists approached Bharata's palace and began to sing his praises and the glory of the dynasty. The musicians and the instrumentalists performed their morning duty: they did it for king Dasaratha before; they did it for Bharata now. Awakened by their noise, Bharata felt doubly distressed. He ordered them to stop. Turning to Satrughna, Bharata expressed his distress in the following words: "Alas, what a terrible blunder has my mother committed! Dasaratha has gone to the other world; Rama who is incarnate dharma has gone to the forest. I am drowned in the ocean of sorrow. And, the state is without a ruler."

In the royal court itself, the mighty sage Vasistha had taken his golden seat and was surrounded by his worthy disciples. He ordered the messengers of the court: "Please request the leaders of our community, and also Bharata and Satrughna, along with their friends, to come to the court quickly. There is urgent business." The holy brahmanas, the priests, the commanders of the army, the counsellors and others arrived promptly. As Bharata entered they cheered him, as they used to cheer Dasaratha.

Sage Vasistha voiced the feelings of the assembly in the following words addressed to Bharata: "My child, king Dasaratha has bequeathed this kingdom, with all its treasures, and its loyal subjects to you. Rama, who had been commanded by the king to go to the forest, promptly obeyed his father's command. In the same manner, it is meet that you should ascend the throne. Ascend the throne which has thus been bestowed upon you both by your father and by your brother, and crown yourself king."

Bharata was greatly pained to hear this. In a faltering voice expressive of profound grief, he submitted: "How can a son of the king Dasaratha usurp the throne which rightfully belongs to another? Rama is the elder and he is in every way superior to me. Bu usurping the throne I shall only gain eternal infamy and hell for myself and disgrace for the dynasty. This sin has been

committed by my mother, but it does not please me. I salute Rama standing here. I shall follow him and him only; and he alone is fit to be king. Holy sages, I have already given in- structions for a contingent of the army and all our leaders to proceed with me to the forest where Rama is. I shall persuade, nay force, Rama to return. If, however, he refuses to return, I shall, like Laksmana,stay with him in the forest. A beautiful road is already being paved for the joyous return of Rama to Ayodhya."

meghasyamam mahabahum sthirasattvam drḍhavratam

kada draksyamahe ramam jagatah soka našanam (83.8)

Soon the mighty river of devout humanity began to flow from Ayodhya to the forest. Leaders of the community, the members of the royal court, the privy counsellors, the chief among the artisans of every type, members of the various guilds carpenters, masons, cobblers, engineers, architects, artists, potters, weavers, goldsmiths and jewellers-- physicians, washermen and tailors, musicians and dancers, formed part of this mighty expedition, led by nine thousand elephants richly caparisoned, sixty thousand chariots and men armed with various weapons, and a cavalry a hundred thousand strong. The people were saying to one another: "When shall we behold that Rama who is the dispeller of the sorrow of the entire world, who is of the colour of the rain-bearing cloud, who has strong arms, who is firmly established in divinity, and who is of firm resolve? The moment we behold him our sorrows will vanish, just as the darkness of the world vanishes when the sun rises." Highly learned brahmanas, resplendent with the lustre of deep medita- tion and spiritual attainments, followed Bharata in their own bullock-carts.

Soon they reached the bank of the holy Ganga. Bharata ordered everybody to pitch tents and camp on the bank of the Ganga for the night. This sea of humanity attracted the attention of Guha. He considered for a while who they might be. He could not fail to see Bharata who was standing in the waters of the Ganga offering libations for the peace of the departed king. He deliberated: what could the motive of Bharata be in leading the vast army to the forest? "Perhaps, Bharata wants to kill Rama and thus ensure his continued Occupancy of the throne? Rama is my Lord and also my friend." He said to his comrades: "We should diligently do what is in his interest. If Bharata is going to the forest to harm Rama, we shall not let him cross the

Ganga. If, however, Bharata is favourably disposed to Rama, then we shall gladly help him cross the river."

Taking some wild fruits and honey, Guha proceeded towards Bharata's tent. Sumantra who knew Guha already, saw him coming and immediately announced the event to Bharata: "Guha is in fact your dear friend and brother, as he is regarded as such by Rama. It is good for you to see him and to befriend him. For, surely he knows where Rama is." With great joy, Bharata had Guha brought into his tent immediately. With natural and spontaneous humility, Guha offered the fruits and honey to Bharata and lovingly said: "Though independent, we consider our principality as a suburb of Ayodhya, Bharata. We welcome you. We do hope you will have a pleasant stay in this region."

dhanyas tvam na tvaya tulyam pasyami jagatitale

ayatnad agatam rajyam yas tvam tyakttum ihe 'cchasi (85.12)

The noble Bharata accepted Guha's hospitality with sincere gratitude. Then he questioned Guha: "Pray, tell me, by which route did my beloved brother proceed to the hermitage of Bharadvaja?" Guha replied at once: "Rest assured, Bharata, that my men will escort you through the forest. But, I wish to ask you a question; kindly give me a truthful answer. Are you or are you not pursuing the sinless Rama with evil intention? The army that surrounds you raises this doubt in my mind."

Bharata felt greatly agitated to hear this question and he politely replied: "Brother, pray, be gracious to me and dismiss that thought. Rama is my most esteemed elder brother whom I regard as a father to me. I tell you the truth: I am going to see Rama and beg of him to return to Ayodhya." Guha was greatly impressed by this revelation. Lovingly and joyously, Guha said to Bharata: "Blessed indeed art thou, O Bharata, and I see no one equal to you on this earth, in as much as you desire to renounce the kingdom that has come to you unsought. Your glory will be eternally sung in all the worlds, in as much as you wish to bring back Rama and thus reverse his misfortune."

As they were speaking thus, the sun sank into the western horizon and darkness enveloped the earth. But, with his heart afire with grief, Bharata did not sleep. Oppressed by the weight of his sorrow. Bharata tossed about,

unable to enjoy peace. Seeing this, however, Guha became utterly convinced of the noble intentions of Bharata.

To relieve him somewhat of his anguish, Guha revealed to him the events of the night when Rama and Laksmana along with sita slept on the same ground. Said Guha: "I tried to persuade Laksmana to sleep, assuring him that I knew the forest very well and that I would guard all three of them against any harm. But he would not. 'How can we sleep, Guha,' said noble Laksmana, 'when we see how this royal couple, Rama and Sita, sleep on bare ground with grass as their bed?' He then began brooding over the fate of Ayodhya and the royal family. He said to me: Unable to bear separation from Rama, surely the king will die. I do not think that either mother Kausalya or my mother will survive this night: even if my mother lives expecting Satrughna, mother Kausalya will die. After completing the fourteen years of exile, Rama and I will return to Ayodhya, along with sita. Talking about the glorious Rama, we thus spent the night. The next day, wearing matted locks and clad in the bark of trees and skin of animals, with their weapons on their shoulders, the two heroes walked away with Sita, with the gait of lordly elephants."

na nunam daivatam kiñcit kalena balavattaram

yatra dasarathi ramo bhumav avam aseta sah (88.11)

Guha's graphic description of the manner in which Rama, Laksmana and Sita departed to the forest, made Bharata contemplate the feet of Rama. Calmly he reflected for a while. They came alive in his consciousness. He visualised the royal family in coarse ascetic attire. Presently, he fainted! Seeing this, Satrughna wailed aloud. Hearing this, the queens rushed to where Bharata lay. Mother Kausalya lovingly lifted him with great tenderness. At her soothing touch, he woke up. She asked him: "Are you well, my son? On you now the lives of all of us and the people of Ayodhya depend."

After reassuring Kausalya that he was well, Bharata requested Guha: "Show me where my brother slept with Sita. On what did he lie down, and what did he eat the night he spent here?" Guha replied: "I placed before the noble Rama fruits and various delicious dishes which he politely returned saying, 'Friend, we do not accept gifts; we only know how to give.' He and Laksmana subsisted only on the water of the holy Ganga. Laksmana then

prepared a bed with grass, under yonder Ingudi tree, on which Rama and Sita slept, without showing the least discomfort."

In ecstasy mixed with intense grief, Bharata said: "Here, under this Ingudi tree, the noble Rama spent the night with princess Sita. These are the blessed blades of grass which touched Rama's body. Accustomed to sleeping on soft beds, standing on floors paved with gold and precious stones, how could that noble prince and princess sleep on grass? He who was accustomed to be awakened by bards and musicians how could he spend the night in this dense forest listening to the howls and roars of wild animals? It is unbelievable, and it appears untrue to me; it makes me feel that it is but a dream. Surely, even the gods are under the sway of adverse time which could make Rama, the son of king Dasaratha sleep on the bare ground, and which could make Sita, the daughter of king Janaka and the daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha sleep on the bare ground! Here, obviously the blessed Sita slept; a few golden threads from her dress have got entangled in the grass here. Ah, the devout wife considers this grass-bed she shared with her husband most comfortable. Blessed is Laksmana that he has gone with Rama, to serve him. Ayodhya is desolate, now that the king and Rama have left it: even the enemies do not wish to invade Ayodhya now, though it is left undefended! From now, I shall also wear matted locks and dress myself in the bark of trees. Rama will return to Ayodhya; and I shall take his place in the forest. If he does not return, I shall also stay with him as an ascetic and as his servant."

jane caitan manahstham te drḍhikaranam astv iti

aprccham tvam tatha 'tyartham kirtim samabhivardhayan (90.21)

Bharata, Satrughna, the queens and the priests and the entire entourage spent the night on the very spot where Rama, Laksmana and Sita spent their night before leaving for Citrakoota. Early the next morning, Bharata got up and seeing Satrughna still in bed, said to him: "Wake up, Satrughna! It is high time we crossed the Ganga. Please get Guha at once so that he may take us across the Ganga." Satrughna instantly replied: "I am not asleep, brother: I, too, am contemplating the glor- ious Rama." At the same time Guha approached them and enquired of the princes if they had had a good night's rest. After an appropriate answer, Bharata continued: "Friend, we are eager to cross the Ganga as soon as possible."

Within minutes, Guha brought together an armada of boats, big and small, several hundred in number, to transport the royal entourage across the holy river Ganga. He himself brought a superb and carpeted boat for the princes and the queens. All of them entered the boats, which now began to cross the river. The elephants swam across with their mahouts. Many were the zealous citizens who swam across the Ganga, some using empty pots to help them float and others depending on nothing but the strength of their arms. Reaching the other bank of the Ganga, the party soon arrived at the forest near Prayaga (Allahabad).

Bharata allowed the entourage to camp in the forest and proceeded to the hermitage of Bharadvaja, accompanied by the sages and the priests alone. Bharadvaja welcomed them approp- riately. He and Vasistha greeted each other with great reverence.- They enquired of one another's welfare.

Bharadvaja intuitively knew the identity of Bharata and addressed him: "You ought to be in Ayodhya, ruling the kingdom: what are you doing here? As a result of a plot engineered by a woman the noble Rama has gone to the forest with his brother and his wife. I do hope that you do not wish to pursue him there and harm him." Bharata was greatly shaken by the words of the sage. In a pleading tone and tear-choked voice, he said "Lord, may such a thought not find a place in your holy mind. Whatever happened in Ayodhya during my absence from there is totally contrary to the wishes of my heart. In fact, I am go- ing to meet Rama and beg him to return to Ayodhya. And, I came here to find out where that noble prince is." Highly pleased, Bharadvaja reassured Bharata: "I knew your mind very well; but expressed the doubt in order to strengthen your resolve and manifest your glory. "I also know where Rama is: he is on the Citrakoota hill. However, spend the night here and depart tomorrow.

te vṛksan udakam bhumim asramesu 'tajams tatha

na himsyur iti tena 'ham eka eva samagatah (9)

The sage Bharadvaja offered the hospitality of the hermit- age to the prince who politely replied: "Surely, the joyous way in which you received us here is more than enough hospitality." The sage, fully realising the prince's reluctance to impose himself and the royal entourage upon the hermit's hospitality, laughed heartily and said: "You are indeed noble, Bharata, in that you do not wish to take undue advantage of our hospitality. But, I would

very much like to entertain and serve your army, too. Why did you leave the army and the other citizens who are accompanying you, at such a distance in the forest?" Bharata once again humbly and politely submitted: "Holy sir, I left them behind and came alone purposely! Kings and princes should always endeavour not to intrude upon the hermitages of ascetics. There is a large army and an even larger contingent of the citizens belonging to various strata of society and professions accompanying me on this pilgrimage. I did not want them to come near this peaceful hermitage and polTute the water and the earth, and damage the trees and huts."

Highly delighted with Bharata's thoughtfulness, the sage however asked the prince to let the army and the royal entourage enter the hermitage grounds and enjoy the sage's hospitality. While Bharata gave instructions accordingly, the sage retired into his own hut and after the necessary preliminary rituals entered into deep meditation and communion with the gods (forces) that control all natural phenomena. In that state of holy communion (samyama), the sage prayed: "May Visvakarma (the lord of all actions) enable me to entertain my guests today. May Indra the chief of the gods, and the three guardian deities of the earth manifest themselves here and enable me to serve the guests properly. May all the rivers that flow on earth or in the celestial regions be present here in their subtle forms. May rivers of spirituous and non-spirituous liquors as also of pure water flow in this hermitage, for the pleasure of my guests. May the heavenly musicians and nymphs come to this hermitage to serve and entertain my royal guests. I also wish that 'trees' laden with wearing apparel and jewelry as also delicious fruits should appear in this hermitage. May there instantly be in this hermitage fragrant garlands, delicious drinks and food and meat."

The holy sage who was in a deep superconscious state of samadhi uttered the appropriate hymns to invoke the presence of the deities concerned. As he thus mentally prayed to these deities, with his palms joined in salutation, all the deities came there, one by one. Instantly a gentle and cool breeze blew over the place, robbing everyone of fatigue.

nai 'va 'yodhyam gamisyamo na gamisyama danḍakan

kušalam bharatasya 'stu ramasyastu tatha sukham (59)

Soon the celestials appeared there. There was music and dancing everywhere. Bharata and his army looked on all this in sheer wonder. As

they were looking, right in front of them, miles and miles of land instantly flattened out and a lovely lawn carpeted the land. Fruit trees appeared instantly every- where. Beautiful mansions materialised everywhere, with stables for the animals of the royal entourage. In their midst, a royal palace materialised, garlands, buntings and other decorations hanging at all its entrances. Bharata entered that palace. Visualising Rama seated on the royal throne, Bharata humbly went round it, bowing to Rama seated on it, and took his place in the prime minister's chair.

After a little while, streams of milk and other beverages appeared. In that instant city there materialised hundreds of celestial men and women, as also the divine musicians who began to sing before Bharata. Others entertained him with their dance. In fact, even as members of Bharata's party were looking, the trees that were standing in the hermitage were transformed into musicians, drummers and dancers. Other trees instantly became royal servants -- men and women. These servants said to the members of the armed forces: "Those of you who are accustomed to spirituous liquors, help yourselves to them; those of you who are hungry, help yourselves to milk and food; and those of you who wish to, eat the excellent meats and other food. Eat and drink according to your wish." These 'instant women' helped the soldiers bathe and get dressed. They helped to wash and feed the animals, too. Bewildered by all this, the animals did not recognise their masters and vice versa!

Bedazzled by what they experienced that evening, the soldiers said to one another: "We do not wish to go to Dandaka forest, nor do we wish to return to Ayodhya! May both Bharata and Rama be blessed and may they be happy!" Delighted to witness the magic powers of the sage Bharadvaja, they said to one another; "This indeed is heaven." All of them picked up new and expensive garments from the trees. They saw in front of them gold and silver vessels full of the choicest delicacies and foodstuff of every sort. There were wells full of liquor and wine. There were innumerable gold plates for everyone to eat from. Every article of luxury had been provided, right down to ready-made toothpicks in their thousands, mirrors, combs and hair-brushes, shoes and wooden sandals, seats and beds. Thus the night passed. Early the next morning, the gods and the celestials took leave of the sage Bharadvaja and the hermitage looked as it was before. Bharata's men were wonderstruck by the marvellous demonstration of the sage's divine powers.

na dosena 'vagantavya kaikeyi bharata tvaya

devanam danavanaṁ ca rsinam bhavitatmanam

hitam eva bhavisyadd hi rama pravrajanad iha (92.31)

Bharata approached the sage Bharadvaja with great humility, joy and gratitude. The sage enquired: "Bharata, did you and your army and your entourage have a good night's rest and were all your needs supplied?" Bharata humbly submitted: "Even so, lord. I am eager to reach the presence of my brother. Pray, bless me, and tell me where he dwells now." The sage gave him full and detailed directions.

Acknowledging his gratitude, Bharata once again bowed to the sage. The noble queens also bowed to the sage. Bharata introduced them to the sage: "This, lord, is the eldest of the queens Kausalya whose beloved son is that foremost among men, Rama, This is Sumitra, the second queen, the mother of Laksmana and Satrughna. This third one is that cruel and extremely wicked queen Kaikeyf, my mother, who has brought this immeasurable unhappiness to all of us, and on account of whose terrible plot the king passed away and Rama went to the forest. The sage Bharadvaja, endowed with omniscience, quickly interrupted and said: "Do not blame Kaikeyi, Bharata: for, surely, this exile of Rama will be productive of great happiness to all. It is for the good of the gods, demons and the sages that Rama has gone to the forest.

Bharata once again bowed to the sage; and immediately all of them proceeded towards Citrakoota hill. After thus travelling for some time, Bharata said to the sage Vasistha: "Holy one, I think we have come very close to the place that the sage Bharad- Here is the Citrakoota hill, and here is the vaja indicated. river Mandakini, too. And there lies the forest where surely Rama dwells." From the elevated ground he was standing on, he pointed out to Satrughna and said: "Look at this army and this entourage approaching the forest. Look at the dust they raise temporarily veiling the sky. The forest which was uninhabited and which was therefore silent, resounds with the noise produced by these people and these animals: it looks like Ayodhya it- self to me."

Bharata ordered the army to stop and despatched a few soldiers to scout round and try to find where Rama's cottage stood. They saw smoke rising at

some distance, and returning to Bharata, said: "Look at that smoke rising yonder: in this uninhabited forest, it is a sure sign of habitation. Surely, Rama or some such ascetic lives there." Agreeing with their intelligence, Bharata ordered the army to halt there and decided to proceed alone, with just Sumantra and Dhrti.

idam eva 'mṛtam prahu rajni rajaṛsayah pare

vanavasam bhavarthaya pretya me prapitamahah (94.19)

In the hermitage on the Citrakoota hill, Rama, Laksmana and sita had settled down. In fact, they had begun to love the simple, austere forest life. Often Rama would roam the forest with Sita, pointing out to her the various wonderful scenes signifying the wealth and the glory of the Citrakoota hill. He would say: "A single look at this pleasing and delightful mountain makes me forget the loss of the throne and even separation from our dear friends of Ayodhya. I think that the mineral wealth of this hill is incalculable. Some of the some are red, some yellowish; and peaks shine like silver, here and there you can actually see precious gems sparkling with the colour of the Ketaka gems like topaz, crystal flower. Look at those beautiful birds with delightful plumage. beautiful, too: and what an extra- Are not these deer ordinary phenomenon it is these leopards and tigers and bears are quite harmless. You can spend hours, days and years, looking at the infinite variety of trees found on the hill and in the forest. And, look at these men and women resembling celestials, sporting happily in the forest. Are not these cascades and waterfalls delightful; and do they not make you feel that this mountain is a living being? I will never taste sorrow if I live for a long, long time in this forest,of course, with you and Laksmana. By coming away to this forest, I am happy that I have been able to fulfil father's pledge and I am happy, too, that Bharata has been installed on the throne. Moreover I have heard it said that my forefathers felt that the forest-life is most conducive to freedom from the cycle of birth and death. And, in addition, the hiT1 excels the capital of the heavenly kingdom in sheer beauty and wealth.

"Look at this holy river Mandakini, Sita. Look at those graceful swans. Look at the trees on both the banks of the river, showering flowers on the water. Holy sages and ascetics wearing matted locks on the crowns of their heads, with deer- skin and the bark of trees for their dress, bathe in this river every

morning. There are others who pray to the sun, standing in the river. The waters of the holy river are pure and purify- ing, too. They are sparkling, clear, clean and holy. Come,come into the river along with me, and bathe in this holy river in which the sages and ascetics who have burnt all their impurities in the fire of their austerities also bathe.

"Sita, revere the dwellers in this forest as you would the holy ones in Ayodhya; regard this river as Sarayu. How happy I am to have Laksmana and you, both of whom are devoted to me and joyously do my bidding."

kim karişyami rajyena sa 'pavadena laksmana (97.3)

na hi 'ccheyam adharmena Sakratvam api laksmana (97.7)

On one occasion, when Rama was sitting outside his hermit- age with Sita and Laksmana, and pointing out to Sita some wild fruits and explaining their qualities and use, he said: "Laksmana, I hear tumultuous noise and I see a cloud of dust yonder. Please climb this tree and find out what is happening. Perhaps a royal party is out hunting in the forest." Laksmana climbed the tree and looked; and he looked terrified! "There is a vast army surrounding this hill. It looks ominous. Let Sita take shelter in that cave; and you had better arm yourself." Rama asked again: "Can you not see whose army it is?"

Laksmana could see whose army it was! And, he said angrily: "Ah, it is Bharata. Having got himself enthroned, he is obviously anxious to kill both of us and thus secure it forever. I can clearly see his personal ensign on the chariot. I can also see jubilant soldiers riding horses and elephants marching towards this hermitage. Come, quick, let us get ready for the fight. Ah, I am happy that today I shall see that treacherous Bharata who is the cause of all our hardship, who is the usurper of the throne of Ayodhya. He will meet with his doom today, and at my hands. It is no sin to kill one who has committed a grievous sin, as Bharata has done. O Rama, it is unwise to let a criminal go unpunished. If Kaikeyi has come, I shall kill her also. I shall rid this good earth of this dreadful fountain of sin. I shall destroy the entire army, and thus propitiate my weapons!"

Rama who coolly listened to all this replied: "Laksmana, I have vowed to fulfil father's promise. And my purpose will be defeated if we kill Bharata! Great ignominy will be ours. What shall we do with a throne thus tainted?

Whatever I seek in this world (wealth, pleasure, dharma etc..) is all for the sake of all of you. But I shall not seek sovereignty of the heaven by unrighteous means Laksmana. I fully believe that Bharata does not mean to harm us. He has surely heard about our exile and greatly distressed by the turn of events is coming to take us back to Ayodhya possibly with the consent of our father. What makes you distrust him, Laksmana? If it is for the sake of the throne that you are saying all this, I shall ask Bharata to let you rule the kingdom for all time to come! And I know he will not refuse." When Rama said this, Laksmana felt a great shame. Looking out again he saw the royal elephant coming forward, and announced: "The king is coming, too." But when Rama saw that the royal (white) umbrella was not to be seen, he was worried. He asked Laksmana to climb down.

yavan na ramam draksyami laksmanam va mahabalam

vaidehim va mahabhagam na me santir bhavisyati (98.6)

After ordering the army and the royal entourage to camp on the outskirts of the forest, Bharata sent soldiers in different directions to look for Rama's hermitage. He himself resolved to look for Rama, if need be, throughout the forest. He said: "Till I see the noble Rama, Laksmana and Sita, I cannot have peace of mind. How can I enjoy peace of mind til I lay my head at the feet of my beloved brother Rama, the feet which bear the marks of royalty on them. Nay, I cannot enjoy peace of mind till that noble prince is installed on the throne which is his alone by birthright." After a while, he went up a tree to have a look around. From there he saw at a very short distance,smoke issuing from a hermitage. The very thought that it might be Rama's hermitage sent a thrill of joy through his being.

He said to one of his aides: "Please get my mothers here: we have located Rama's hermitage." As they were proceeding in the direction from which the smoke issued, Bharata saw various signs which confirmed his assumption: he saw the hut at a distance, he saw pathways cleared, he saw cut timber, he saw petals of flowers on the ground (obviously petals which had dropped as they were being taken for worship), he saw little strips of cloth tied to trees here and there in order to serve as 'land-marks'. "Here and very soon I shall behold the lotus- like face of Rama," he exclaimed in joy; but only for a moment, for the very next moment he was tormented by the thought that the noble prince who was born to rule the world, to enjoy

sovereignty, to delight in regal pleasures, was sitting on the ground in a hut in a dense forest, subjecting his delicate limbs to severe hardship all this on his (Bharata's) account. Describing all this again and again to his companions, Bharata shed tears.

He had reached the hermitage. From a distance he saw the gold-sheathed weapons of Rama hanging outside the hut. He saw the ritual altar at which Rama worshipped daily. And, soon, he saw Rama himself seated on the ground on the outer verandah of the hut along with Sita and Laksmana. To see Rama in the ascetic garb broke Bharata's heart. He saw that Rama had matted locks gathered on top of his head. He saw that he was wearing bark and skins. He rushed towards Rama's feet. He cried: "O my noble brother," but he could not say anything more. His throat was choked with tears. Tears flowed down the cheeks of Satrughna. Rama got up and embraced both of them; and tears rained from his eyes, too.

upaya kušalaṁ vaidyam bhṛtyam samdüsane ratam

suram aisvarya kamam ca yo na hanti sa vadhyate (29)

Seeing Bharata after a long time, Rama was overwhelmed with joy. After repeatedly embracing him and kissing his fore- head in tender affection, Rama seated Bharata on his lap and began to enquire of his welfare and the welfare of everyone in Ayodhya.

"I am happy to see you after a long time, Bharata: but why have you come to this dense and uninhabited forest? Why have you left father alone in the palace and come here? How can the old king endure your absence? I hope the king has survived the great tragedy that struck him. I hope, too, that he has not left this world. And, are you all right, Bharata? I hope you have not been cheated of your sovereignty, simple and pure-hearted that you are? Please also tell me how is the venerable sage Vasistha? Do you honour and worship him, as you should, my beloved brother? How is my mother Kausalya, and how is Sumitra; how is our glorious mother Kaikey, I hope she is happy now.

"How are the priests of the royal household? Do you treat them with due respect and do they perform their religious duties properly? Do you honour the gods, our ancestors, the royal servants, the preceptors who are as worshipful as one's father, aged people, physicians and also the holy

brahmanas? Are you looking after your own personal teacher, Sudhanva who is well versed in warfare and knows the secret of missiles. And have you appointed the right type of counsellors to advise you? This is essential: for it is important to have ministers who will maintain strict secrecy, and this is the secret of victory. I hope you do not act without the advice of the ministers; and I also hope that you do not consult too many people. Again, I hope you do not proclaim your decisions before they are given effect to. Do you also ensure that the official secrets are not leaked out by untrustworthy officials?

"Do you realise that one wise man is more beneficial to the country than thousands of fools? Have you entrusted the most important offices to first-rate officers, secondary offices to mediocre officers and so on? Do the people have confidence in the ministers you have appointed? Do you have a brave, wise and able person as the chief of your army? For it is important to get rid of a physician whose treatment aggravates the suffering of the sick, a rebellious servant and a hero who is desirous of political power --he who does not get rid of these is himself destroyed. I hope that the servants of the state receive their wages at the appropriate time, promptly: or else the administrative machinery becomes in-efficient.

yani mithya 'bhisastanam patanty asrani raghava

tani putra pasun ghnanti prityartham anusasatah (59)

Rama continued:

"I hope you are vigilant, as a wise ruler should be, and have intelligence officers constantly watching the foremost functionaries in the state, they who are favourably disposed towards you and those who may not be so disposed. Especially they who have been hostile towards you and who may have later returned to your fold, should be carefully watched. I hope, Bharata, you do not encourage the worldly-minded brahmanas who consider themselves learned but who are experts in destructive endeavour.

"Tell me, O Bharata, is Ayodhya as impregnable as it has always been, and as its name implies? And, are the people of different groups and classes carrying on their respective professions diligently? Our kingdom has always been free from crime and violence, poverty and drought, and full of wealth of every kind, inhabited by cultured men and women with a keen sense of

commonweal: is this tradition being maintained by you, my dear brother? Do the farmers and industrialists enjoy your special protection, so that the state of national economy may be sound? And, are the womenfolk in the kingdom properly looked after and guarded against all hardship and exploitation: and, what is equally important, I do hope there is no excessive reliance on them nor are they taken into your confidence in matters of national security.

"Brother, now tell me : are the forests in our territory well maintained? Are the cows and other animals properly taken care of? Do you ensure that your fort and other fortifications have adequate supplies of food and ammunition? I hope with all this you are able to balance your budget and you do not incur a deficit. And now something very important: have you ensured that law and order are strictly maintained in the state, that a thief does not go unpunished because of the greed of corrupt officials, that the courts of justice are totally impartial and that no innocent man is ever punished? For, the tears that fall from the eyes of an innocent man who is punished destroy the king's welfare.

"In your own person, O Bharata, do you strictly adhere to the code of righteous living? Are you regular in your prayers and religious practices? Pray, do not let dharma, material welfare and enjoyment of righteous pleasures, overlap one another. Each in its own good time, is a good rule. It is good to remember that the king himself should be the paragon of all the virtues which are expected of the people of the state. In addition to these, you should know how to deal with other kings and how to win the friendship of the men, women and children of the state. It is by ruling their kingdom according to dharma that our own forefathers have enjoyed life here and attained heaven hereafter."

kamakaro maha prajña guruṇam sarvada 'nagha

upapanneṣu dareṣu putreṣu ca vidhiyate (101.18)

Rama then asked Bharata: "Now, please tell me, why have you come to the forest, abandoning your rightful place in Ayodhya?"

Tearfully and with joined palms, Bharata replied: "Our father, the king, was driven by his wife, my mother, to commit the most terrible sin. But tormented by the grief caused by his separation from you, he ascended to

heaven. My mother, her- self, who is responsible for this despicable act will soon descend to hell. I am your humble servant, O Rama: and pray, grant me this boon return to Ayodhya and be our king. This is the prayer of all our friends and relations, of all the people of our kingdom." Bharata fell at the feet of Rama and touched them with his head.

Rama lifted him up and fondly embracing him, said, with a cheerful countenance: "Bharata, my heart recoils from un- righteousness. Shall I set aside dharma for the sake of a kingdom? Be not disturbed, Bharata. I do not find any fault in you, in the least. I do not hold you responsible for what has happened. And, pray, do not blame your mother, either. The elders have freedom to do what they please with their wives and children and disciples. Hence, father, too, was quite Justified in what he did. Whether he installed me on the throne or sent me to the forest -- he had the right to do what he pleased. It is even so with our mothers, Bharata. We are bound to obey their commands, When our mother has com- manded me to live in the forest, how can I go against it? Even so, you have been commanded to rule Ayodhya; and you should obey, too."

Bharata replied: "Being the younger son ineligible to the throne, Rama, I am not bound by this rule of conduct! In our dynasty it has always been that the throne passed from father to the eldest son. How can we violate this rule? The people speak of the king as a man: he who rules righteously leading the state to prosperity, they call a superman: but I think the king is truly a divinity. This will prove true if you install yourself on the throne."

Remembering king Dasaratha, Bharata said to Rama: "Just after you had left Ayodhya and even while I was in the Kekaya kingdom our father passed away. Come, brother, offer libations to him. For, they say that libations offered by dear ones prove of immeasurable good to the departed soul: and you were dear to father, who left this world thinking of you, and longing for you."

idam bhunksva maharaja prito yad asana vayam

yad annah puruso bhavati tad annas tasya devatah (103.30)

When Rama was reminded that his father had passed away, he fainted. The three brothers and Sita quickly sprinkled water on his face and body, and helped to revive him quickly. On re- gaining consciousness, Rama

expressed his grief: "The king has passed away; and you want me to return to Ayodhya! What shall I do in Ayodhya when the king has passed away; who will govern Ayodhya now that the best among kings has passed away? Bharata, you and Satrughna are truly blessed in that you were able to serve the king and perform his funeral rites. Even after the expiry of the fourteen years, I do not feel like returning to Ayodhya, now that father is not there. Who will guide me, who will call me with affection, who will whisper endearing words in my ear when I have done something good?"

Then, they all went to the river Mandakini. Standing in the water, Rama offered libations of water for the peace of the departed soul: "May this water offered by me serve you,O king, who has joined our forefathers." He then offered the pulp of the Ingudi tree mixed with fruits: "Pray, accept this O king, for this is our food: indeed what food a man eats that Indeed he offers to the gods, too.

After this, he returned to his hut along with his brothers and Sita. The entire forest and the hillside resounded with the mourning of the princes. The members of Bharata's army and the royal entourage which had been stationed at some distance from the hermitage heard this heart-rending noise and were greatly distressed. At the same time, they surmised that Bharata had discovered the hermitage of Rama. They ran towards the hermitage from where the sound came. Some abandoned their vehicles and their mounts: and they ran on foot. Others who were older came in their vehicles and on horses and other animals.

Even from a distance they could see Rama sitting outside his hut along with the brothers and Sita. They had despaired of ever being able to set their eyes on him. And, they had, therefore, been mentally cursing the wicked Kaikey for being responsible for the banishment of Rama. In total self-forgetful ecstasy they saw Rama; their tear-bedimmed eyes feasted on Rama. Rama, too, responded to their love. He greeted each one appropriately. It was a moving sight; though tears flowed freely.

sarve ksayanta nicayah patananṭah samucchrayah

samyoga viprayoganta maranantam ca jivitam (105.16) atmanam anusoca tvam kimanyam anusocasi

ayuste hiyate yasya sthitasya ca gatasya ca (105.21)

The queens and the sage Vasistha then approached Rama's hermitage. Kausalya pointed out to Sumitra the pathway which Laksmana had made from the hermitage to the bank of the river. Kausalya saw the Ingudi-pulp offering which Rama had made to the departed soul of the king and lamented: "Lo, the mighty monarch has to be content with this poor offering: for his son, prince Rama, who is born to rule, lives an ascetic life."

Rama, when he saw them approaching the hut, ran forward

And clasped their feet; after him Lakşmapa bowed to them. Then Sita followed suit. Kausalya embraced Sita and cried: "Seeing you endure such hardship, the fire of grief consumes me, O Sita." Rama bowed to the sage Vasistha. They all sat down with Bharata seated just behind Rama, with joined palms. A11 of them eagerly waited for whatever Bharata had to say.

Early the next morning, all of them assembled as before. Bharata said: "The kingdom has been bestowed upon me by my father and by my mother. It is mine. And, I hereby give it to you, O Rama! No one can be its king except you. I am not your equal." The entire assemblage heartily approved.

But, Rama replied: "The embodied being, Bharata, is not a free agent; he is driven to and fro by the end-result of his own action. However, everything in this world has destruction as its end, all exaltation has fall as its end, all meeting has separation as its end, and all living has death at the end. The clear recognition that a fruit has to fall and that a man has to die, frees one from fear. All this is natural and inevitable. One does not grieve over death any more than one grieves over the ripening and falling of a fruit! Grieve not for another, Bharata, be alert and see that life is passing whether you are sitting or moving. Unwise men do not perceive the ebbing away of life. Similarly,people do not perceive that time brings people together and separates them, even as logs of wood are brought together and separated in water. Perceiving all this clearly, one should diligently work out one's own true happiness: for such true happiness is indeed the goal of everyone.

"Our noble father who was devoted to righteousness has fulfilled his life's mission and has passed away. Mourning for him will not postpone our own death! Return to Ayodhya and do what you should do; rule the kingdom. And, I too, shall do what I should do live in the forest for fourteen years. This is the course of right action, O Bharata."

pun namno narakad yasmat pitaram trayate sutah

tasmat putra iti prokttah pitṛn yah pati sarvatah (107.12)

Bharata addressed Rama once again: "O Rama, there is none equal to you in the world. Knower of the self that you are, you do not lose your equanimity even in the midst of the greatest calamity. My mother has committed a terribly sinful deed, in my absence: though it is supposed to be for my sake, I dislike it. But for the fact that I honour the code which forbids a prince from killing a woman, I should have killed her. I hold her alone responsible and not our father: he was noble, with a great many noble deeds to his credit, he was aged, he was my father and so god himself to me, and above all he has passed away. Surely he would not have sanctioned this sin, if he had been in his senses. His action confirms the truth of an ancient saying, that one's mind gets muddled when death is Near. As a worthy son of our father, it is proper for you to set aside this error committed by him. For, such has been declared to be the duty of a dutiful son: to rectify the errors of his father. If you do so, you will then have saved me, my mother as also my father from sin and calumny. Where is forest- life and where is kingship; where is matted locks and. where is the royal function of protecting the people pray, do not allow this incongruity in your conduct. It is a prince's duty to ascend the throne and righteously rule the kingdom: to run away from it and embrace an ascetic life is improper. If you are averse to pleasure, you can, even while ruling the kingdom, lead an ascetic life in Ayodhya! O Rama, I am junior and inferior to you in all respects: I cannot take your place. I have brought all the priests and ministers with me; let us consecrate you for the throne here and now. If, however, you do not concede, I shall also stay with you in the forest." Rama, however, remained unmoved. The people, seeing this, were proud of Rama for his firmness and were unhappy because he would not crown himself king. They applauded Bharata.

Rama said: "I am in agreement with your arguments, Bharata. But there are other considerations. When father sought to marry your mother, he offered the kingdom itself as the price, which meant that her son or her nominee would be king. Moreover, you know how he had granted her two boons which she claimed now. We should guard the word which father has given. It is the sacred duty of a son. Because he saves his father from the hell known as 'put', the son is known as putra. You go to Ayodhya; I shall go to Dandaka

forest. You rule the people; I shall rule the dwellers of the forest. You shall have the royal umbrella over your head; I shall find the shade of a tree. You have Satrughna, and I have Laksmana as a help-mate. Thus both of us will discharge our duty to our father."

satyam eva 'nṛsamsam ca rajavṛttam sanatanam

tasmat satya 'tmakam rajyam satye lokah pratisthitah (109.10)

A brahmana named Jabali intervened in the dialogue. He said to Rama: "It is proper that one should stick to one's word; but you should not have taken this improper vow in the first place. No one is related to anyone else in this world, O Rama: everyone comes alone and goes alone. Only mad men think someone is his father or mother, etc. These relationships are temporary shelters which one invents and resorts to during the course of the journey of his life. Giving up this deluded idea that the king was your father, whose word you had to honour, etc., return to Ayodhya and ascend the throne which is yours. Worrying over departed ancestors and endeavouring to please them is foolish, O Rama: if by offering rice-balls in libations here, the departed ancestor can be satisfied, why does not one do so to satisfy the hunger of a relation travelling in distant lands? Rely on direct perception and do what you consider to be right; and do not depend upon heresay."

Rama was annoyed that a brahmana could tender such heretical counsel. He rebuked the brahmana: "If I follow your advice I shall become a hypocrite. Though appearing to be good I shall in fact be the very opposite. If I do what I please or what I consider to be right, I shall be setting a bad example : and the people will copy my example. I shall not swerve from the path of truth: for truth alone is praiseworthy royal con- duct. The kingdom and the whole earth are established in truth. People suspect, fear and shun the man who is untruthful and breaks his own promises. Truth alone is god in this world dharma is founded on truth; there is no religion higher than truth. Knowing this how can I swerve from the path of truth, O brahmana! I bear this truth on my head; the matted locks I carry because the holy ones do so, too. The ignorant man thinks evil, tells lies and indulges in wicked deeds. Thereby he loses all that is good and wholesome in this world. If I follow your advice, I shall also be guilty of this three-fold sin. Nay, I shall continue to dwell in the forest discharging my duty to father. Having come into this world of

activity, one should engage oneself in right action. Fire, wind and soma share the fruits of man's action."

Jabali thereupon said: "I am not an unbeliever, nor do I say what the unbelievers say, nor does unbelief exist. In accordance with the time, I have become a believer again; and in due course of time, I shall become an unbeliever. What I said has served its purpose: it expressed my and the people's eagerness that you should be king, and it has brought out your glory as a firm adherent to truth."

pita hy enam janayati purusam puruṣarabha

prajñam dadati ca 'caryas tasmat sa gurur ucyate (111.3)

Seeing that Rama was offended by Jabali's arguments, the sage Vasistha intervened and said: "O Rama, Jabali knows very well what should be and should not be done in this world; but in his eagerness to make you return to Ayodhya, he offered his arguments. I shall now narrate to you your own ancestry, from the Creator, his son Marici whose son was Kasyapa and whose son Vivasvan, the sun, founded the solar dynasty to which you belong. Manu was the son of Vivasvan and his son Iksvaku ruled Ayodhya." Vasistha then mentioned all the ancestors of The throne had invariably passed to the eldest Rama by name. son of the previous king. Vasistha said: "This tradition should not be violated by you." He continued: "Father, mother and preceptor -- these three are the gurus of a person. Father only gives birth to him, whereas the preceptor gives him the highest wisdom and therefore he is called guru. By following my advice you will not be incurring sin."

Rama was inflexible in his resolve. He submitted to the sage Vasistha: "The debt that a person owes to his father and mother is indeed great: for all the loving and tender service he has received from them, in feeding him, in putting him to sleep and in speaking sweet words to him. Such a father's command, that I should go to the forest, I will not falsify.

Bharata now sternly turned to Sumantra and commanded: "Prepare a bed of kuša grass for me in front of this hut; I shall lie down there, not eating nor drinking anything, till Rama returns to Ayodhya." Sumantra looked at Rama! Rama said to Bharata: "Such a course of conduct is not appropriate for a prince! A brahmana can do so. No, Bharata, give up this impossible

task and return to Ayodhya." Bharata then turned to the people: "Why don't you talk Rama out of his resolve?" And the spokesman of the people replied: "We have listened to both of you. What you say is right and noble; and we see that Rama adheres to the truth and does not wish to transgress his father's command. Hence we are unable to say anything."

Bharata made one last attempt. He said: "All of you know that I did not covet the throne nor desire the banishment of Rama. If Rama insists on staying in the forest, I humbly offer myself as his substitute; let Rama return to Ayodhya." But Rama replied: "Oh, no: a commitment entered into by our father, cannot be nullified by either you or me. And, to find a substitute would not be truthful adherence to that commitment. I shall fulfil my part, Bharata: and so should you fulfil your part."

laksmis candrad apeyad va himavan va himam tyajet

atiyat sagaro velam na pratijñam aham pituh (112.18)

The sages who had assembled on the grounds of Rama's hermitage, and indeed the sages who were witnessing this divine event from their invisible realms, all of them lauded the righteous conduct of both the brothers. They now turned to Bharata and pleaded that he should accept Rama's advice: "We, too, wish to see that Rama fulfils the promise of his father made to Kaikey." Rama felt greatly encouraged by this counsel of the sages and he sang their glories.

Bharata made one last attempt. He repeated the fundamental arguments: "O Rama, you are equally obliged to adhere to the family tradition, to lend ear to the prayers of myself, and your mother. Moreover, I cannot rule the kingdom. All the people want that you should be their king." Once again Bharata fell down at the feet of Rama and clasped them to his head. Once again Rama put Bharata on his lap and affectionately said to him: "You are endowed with natural and genuine humility, Bharata, and with that you can rule the whole world. The moon may become bereft of light, the Himalayas may be bereft of snow, and the ocean may break its bounds but I will not dishonour the promise given by father. And this is my request to you: whatever might have been mother Kaikeyi's motives in doing what she did, you should not mind that but you should continue to treat her as your mother."

The sage Vasistha suggested a compromise! Rama should make a gift of his wooden sandals to Bharata, which could be installed on the throne in Rama's stead. Bharata at once placed the sandals in front of Rama and prayed to him to bless them. When Rama had done so, Bharata bowed to them and said: "The business of the state will be entrusted to these sandals, O Rama; and, living on fruits and roots, I shall live outside Ayodhya, eagerly looking forward to your return. If you do not return the day after the expiry of the fourteen years, I shall enter into the fire." Rama agreed.

The brothers and the mothers took leave of Rama with tearful eyes; and with tearful eyes Rama re-entered his hut.

Reverently placing Rama's sandals on his head, Bharata turned towards Ayodhya. On the way, he met the sage Bharadvaja again and narrated to him all that happened in Citrakoota. The sage Bharadvaja was happy and happily pronounced the following words of blessing: "It is no wonder that all the noble qualities abide in you, O Bharata, even as water seeks lowly spots on earth. You are truly humble. Blessed is the father that has a son like you."

tatastu bharatab Sriman abhisicyaryapduke

tad adhinas tada rajyam karayamasa sarvada (115.26)

Bharata entered Ayodhya which appeared to be completely de- void of life, of joy, of any sign of prosperity. It was a city in mourning, mourning for the late king Dasaratha, mourning for the exiled Rama. Bharata sighed and said: "Surely, because my brother has left the city, it has lost all its splendour."

As soon as his mothers had entered their apartments, Bhara- ta announced his decision: "I shall immediately proceed to Nandigrama, and I shall dwell there enduring this great sorrow caused by my separation from Rama." The counsellors agreed to the proposal. Sumantra had the chariot ready. All the preceptors, the counsellors, the heads of the administration, as also the army, accompanied Bharata to Nandigrama. All the way to Nandigrama, Bharata held Rama's sandals devoutly on his head.

On arrival at Nandigrama, Bharata announced again: This kingdom has been given to me on trust by my brother who has al- so given me these precious sandals of his, which will attend to the welfare of the kingdom. I shall manage this kingdom as a trustee during the period of Rama's absence,

eagerly looking forward to the blessed day of his return to Ayodhya. Immediately on his return I shall hand the reins of the kingdom to him and I shall rejoice when he wears these sandals on his feet once more. Thus even now I place the burdens of the state upon Rama, upon his blessed sandals; and thus I absolve myself of the sin of usurping the throne."

The noble Bharata took up his residence in Nandigrama, clad in bark with his matted locks gathered on the crown of his head. He himself held the royal umbrella over Rama's sandals; and he offered all royal edicts to the sandals for approval before is- suing them. He enthroned and crowned the sandals of Rama, and, remaining subordinate to them carried on the administration of the kingdom. Whatever work had to be undertaken, whatever decisions had to be made, and whatever tribute had been received - Bharata offered all these to the sandals of Rama at first and then took the necessary action.

iha me bharato dṛṣṭo mataras ca sanagarah

sa ca me smṛtir anveti tan nityam anusocatah (117.2)

One day, approaching an elderly hermit, Rama humbly enquired: "Holy sir, I notice a certain restlessness amongst the holy men here. From their behaviour I infer that we are the cause of it. Pray, tell me: have I been guilty of actions unworthy of the honour of my family? Or, has my younger brother Laksmana done something to annoy the sages? Or, may it be that the young lady Sita has committed an act of indiscretion?"

The elderly sage quickly replied: "Oh, no, Rama, nothing but the most exemplary conduct has been seen by all of us in you, Laksmana and Sita. But, it is true that there is some restless- ness amongst us. It has been caused by a demon known as Khara who is the younger brother of Ravana. He is a cannibal. He has harassed the sages living in Janasthana; and now he has turned his attention towards this place. We believe that he hates your presence here. And, as long as you are living here, so long these demons will harass the ascetics. They desecrate our altars and pollute the very atmosphere. Hence, we wish to leave this place and go elsewhere today. These demons do not like you, Rama: and you will also do well to move from here." The hermits left Citrakoota.

Some time later, Rama said to himself: "I shall also leave this place, but for other reasons. "It was here I met Bharata, and my mothers and the citizens of Ayodhya. The memory of that And, the meeting Tingers and disturbs the mental equilibrium. elephants and the horses which accompanied Bharata have also polluted the place. It is better for us to move on." Deciding thus, Rama, with Laksmana and Sita, left Citrakoota and went towards the Dandaka forest.

Soon they reached the holy hermitage of the sage Atri who received them warmly. He called his celebrated wife Anasuya and asked her to receive Sita. Anasuya thereupon took Sita into the hut; Sita bowed to the venerable lady who in turn blessed Sita. Anasuya said: "You have done the right thing, O Sita, by follow- ing your noble husband, abandoning your relations and friends. That noble woman who loves her husband whether he lives in a city or in a forest, whether he is good or not so good, inherits the glorious worlds. Even if he is of bad conduct, lustful, and poor, for noble women the husband alone is supreme god. Serve your husband, noble Sita, treating him as your god; and you will attain fame here and heaven hereafter."

navikṛtan ca tat sarvan vakyais te dharmacariṇi

pati Susrüsanan naryas tapo na 'nyad vidhfyate (118.9)

Sita rejoiced to hear the wholesome advice of Anasuya. Sita said: "I am beholden to you for your words of wisdom, worshipful lady! It is true, even as you have said, that a noble woman should treat her husband as god even if he is of evil disposition. How much more so, if he is as godly as Rama is! Indeed, the way in which I should behave towards him has clearly been indicated to me by my mother-in-law: nay, even before my marriage, by my mother herself. What you have said has confirmed and reiterated their admonition: that except service of the husband, the woman has no other form of worship or asceticism. I remember too the Lives of exemplars of this great principle the great Savitri, and Rohini, and your self, too."

Anasuya was pleased with these words uttered by Sita and said: "Sita, I have accumulated a lot of merit by my austerities. Please mention any boon of your choice: I shall give you whatever you want." What would Sita want or ask for? She remained silent, after saying: "Your blessings are more than sufficient for me." Admiring her modesty and desirelessness, Anasuya continued: "Well, then, I shall myself choose a boon for you! Here are di-

vine garlands, dress, jewelry and cosmetic articles which will enhance the beauty of your limbs. These will enable you to enjoy unfading beauty and thus enhance the delight of your noble husband, Rama."

Sita humbly accepted the noble lady's gifts. Anasuya then requested Sita to narrate how she got married to Rama. With great joy, Sita told her the story of her immaculate birth, of her growth as the daughter of king Janaka, of the king's pro- clamation concerning her suitor, of the divine weapon of lord Siva, of Rama's visit to Mithila along with Laksmana and the sage Visvamitra, of Rama's prowess in firing the mighty weapon. "Then, my father immediately offered me in marriage to Rama. He however, hesitated not knowing what his father's reaction would be! Soon his father also came, approved of the alliance, and thus I obtained the hand of Rama," concluded Sita.

Later, the hermits of the forest told Rama: "Rama, there are many demons in yonder forest. They are cannibals. They have many different forms. They drink blood. They eat ascetics and celibates who may be unclean or non-vigilant. Kindly destroy them, O Rama. If you go along that path, you will be able to enter that dense forest."

END OF AYODHYA KANDAM

ARANYA KANDAM

16th APRIL

The Forest Life

nyasta danda vayam rajan jitakrodha jitendriyah

raksitavyas tvaya Sasvad garbha bhotas tapodhanah (1.21)

Rama entered the dense and fearsome forest named Dandaka. Yet, in that forest they beheld the hermitages of sages who had made the forest their abode. Grass mats and deer-skin seats were found everywhere around each one of these hermitages. The little huts were yet very well maintained. The surroundings were clean. The altars for the performance of fire worship proclaimed the sanctity of the place. The ease with which birds and beasts

played around the hermitages bore witness to the cosmic love that radiated from the hearts of the sages. The sages themselves filled the entire atmosphere with the auspicious sound of their chanting of the vedic hymns.

Rama approached them with reverence and humility, with his weapons unloaded and sheathed. The sages, too, received Rama, Laksmana and Sita with great joy and affection. After entertaining them with fruits, roots, etc., the sages lovingly and reverently said to Rama: "You are our king, Rama, whether you are in a city or in the forest; and we are fit to be protected by you. The king wielding the sceptre is worshipful in as much as he is regarded a part-manifestation of the Lord himself. We, hermits, have renounced violence and anger, and we are wholly devoted to the conquest of our own mind and senses: hence it is for you to protect our person.

Rama spent a night in the hermitage which was situated at the very entrance to that dense forest. The next morning, he took leave of the sages and proceeded on his way. The forest grew more and more formidable and awesome. Very soon, Rama saw a terrible demon of indescribably ugly and terrifying form. This demon, too, saw Rama, Laksmana and Sita. He roared aloud. The monster sprang towards Sita, took her, and after running away to a distance, said to Rama and Laksmana: "Hey you! What have you to do with this young woman -- you who look like ascetics? You are a disgrace to the sacred orders of the ascetics. I shall take this woman away and marry her. 1, the demon Viradha, shall destroy both of you sinners and drink your blood just now."

Sita was sorely stricken with fear. Deeply distressed, Rama said to Laksmana: "What a tragedy, my dear Laksmana, at the very commencement of our forest-life! Surely, mother Kaikeyi will be extremely pleased to hear that we have all been killed even before we settled down in the forest. To me there is nothing more tormenting than to see beloved Sita touched by another man."

The brave Laksmana consoled Rama with the words: "Please do not worry, Rama! In a few moments, the earth will drink this demon's blood."

avate capi man rama praksipya kusali vraja

raksasan gata sattvanam esa dharmah sanatanah (4.22)

The monster roared again: "Hey you two! Tell me who you are, and where you are going." Rama politely replied: "We are princes by birth, and we belong to the famous Iksvaku dynasty. Pray, tell us who you are and what you are doing in this forest."

The demon replied: "O noble king! I shall tell you who I am. My father is Jiva, and my mother Satahrada. Here I am known as Viradha. I propitiated lord Brahma the creator by my austerities and gained from him the boon that I shall be invulnerable to weapons and that I shall not die from broken limbs or injury. You can therefore not destroy me! Leave this woman and run away from here!"

Defying him, Rama struck him with several missiles. Though pierced by them, he did not die. He, however, left Sita and ran towards the brothers with a lance. Rama broke the lance with his own missiles. But these missiles, however, had no power against Viradha: they struck him but when he yawned, they drop- ped to the ground! Viradha caught hold of Rama and Laksmana and lifting them up with one hand each, carried them away. Laksmana tried to stop him. But, Rama said: "Let him take us where he will: he is going in the same direction as we wish to go."

But Sita was horrified. She shouted to the demon: "Pray, O best among demons! Take me and throw me to the wild animals; but leave the princes." Hearing this, Rama and Laksmana decided to dispose of the demon. Still sitting on his shoulders, the two princes each broke an arm. Viradha fell down; and they, now standing near him began hitting him with their fists. Rama said to Laksmana: "He is protected by his boon; we cannot kill him in this manner. Dig a pit in the ground. We shall bury him, and that is the only way in which he can meet with his end."

The monster Viradha now spoke: "O Rama, I have been defeated by you, and my end is near. Due to the demoniacal quality of ignorance I did not recognise your glory. I was a celestial named Tumburu, but had incurred the displeasure of Kubera who cursed me, and so I became a demon. At my pleading he said: 'When Rama kills you in a fight, you will return to heaven. Released from, that curse, I shall now return to heaven. Yonder lives the sage Sarabhanga; kindly go to see him, after burying me in that pit. For, this is the time-honoured way of dealing with demons." Laksmana soon finished

digging a huge pit into which they lowered the monster Viradha. Re-united with Sita, the two princes proceeded on their course.

ahan jnstva naravyghra vartamanam aduratah

brahmalokam na gacchami tvan adṛsṭva priyatithim (5.29)

Rama then said to Laksmana: "This is truly a dreadful forest and we have already had a foretaste of its true nature. Let us hurry to the hermitage of the sage Sarabhanga."

As he approached the hermitage, Rama beheld a marvel. He saw a radiant space vehicle which stood without touching the earth. In it was the chief of the gods, Indra himself, shining with the resplendence of the sun. As Indra was talking to the sage Sarabhanga, angels and sages were serving him in many ways. Rama pointed this marvel out to Laksmana and said: "Laksmana, see this wonder! Indra, the god of gods himself person- ally visiting the hermitage of the sage Sarabhanga. I have heard that he thus visits the sages' fire worship; but now I have seen it. Look at these celestials who have also come with him. All of them have the appearance of young men of twenty-five years of age: indeed, I have heard that the celestials are forever twenty-five years of age! Please stay here with Sita, and I shall find out if it is in fact Indra." But, when Rama went nearer the hermitage, Indra said to the sage: "Rama is coming. This is, however, not the right occasion for me to see him. I shall see him after he has killed the wick- ed Ravana in battle. Rama has to do a great many wonders here. I shall go now. And, you, too, move from here, to meet him." Indra's space vehicle rose into the sky.

Rama then permitted Laksmana and Sita to accompany him, and all of them bowed to the sage Sarabhanga. Out of curiosity, Rama enquired why Indra had visited the hermitage. The sage replied: "O Rama, he came to take me away to the highest realm known as Brahma Loka which has been earned by my austerities. But, knowing that you were in the neighbourhood, I did not want to go to Brahma Loka without seeing you and without serving you as a guest should be served. Having seen you, I shall ascend to the higher regions one by one. I have earned them by dint of penance; and I humbly offer them to you today, o Rama; please be gracious to accept them."

Deeply touched by the love and affection of the mighty sage, Rama replied: "I can actually bring all those worlds to you, O sage; but kindly indicate a

place in this forest for us to dwell." The sage replied: "Pray, O Rama, go to the hermitage of the sage Sutiksna who will surely indicate where you can reside in this forest." After saying this, as Rama was looking on, the sage kindled the sacred fire and entered into it. The fire consumed his physical body. The sage then shone with the lustre of fire and had the body of a young man of twenty-five years of age. He rose to the Brahma Loka, and was welcomed by the Creator.

yat karoti paran dharmadh munir mülaphalasanah

tatra rajñas catur bhagah praja dharmeṇa raksatah (6.14)

Soon after the ascension to heaven of the sage Sarabhanga, the sages and the ascetics of the neighbourhood called on Rama. These sages belonged to different orders of ascetics. There were Vaikhanasas and Valakhilyas who are said to have sprung from the nails and the hairs of the creator Brahma. Other orders included, they who after they had eaten their single daily meal ensured that nothing was left for the next, they who drank solar and lunar rays, they who lived on powdered stone, or on leaves, they who used nothing but their own teeth to cut, powder or soften food, they who remained immersed in water, they who lay down with no bed, they who did not lie down at all, they who had no time for anything other than their spiritual practices, they who lived on water, they who lived on air, they who had only the sky for their roof, they who lay down on the altar, they who lived on tree-tops, they who wore only wet clothes, the self-controlled ones devoted to the repetition of the divine name, and they who surrounded themselves with fires with the blazing sun overhead. A11 were radiant with the lustre of self-realisation. They greeted Rama and said to him: "Lord, the king appropriates a sixth of everyone's income; in return he should protect the people, treating them as his own children. If he does not he incurs sin. The king has a fourth share in the spiritual wealth earned by the sages; and in re- turn he should protect them. It is in this spirit that we approach you, our king and protector. Here in this forest are diabolical beings that terrorise the sages and ascetics. Pray, protect us from them." Rama graciously replied at once: "In- deed, I shall. It is surely for this purpose that my noble father sent me to the forest."

Taking leave of the sages, Rama travelled onwards to the hermitage of the sage Sutiksna. The sage was serenely seated in the meditation posture. Rama

introduced himself to the sage. The sage graciously replied: "Rama, I have been awaiting your arrival. I have heard everything from Indra who visited me just now to announce that I could now ascend to the higher worlds earned by my penance. On the strength of that penance I pray that the three of you may enjoy your life in the forest." Rama thereupon requested the sage to indicate a suitable dwelling for him. The sage replied: "Stay in this hermitage itself. Except deer, you will have no trouble from any other creature." But Rama submitted: "If I live here, it is possible that I might kill the deer, and this would be extremely displeasing to you. Hence I do not think I should settle down here."

Enjoying the hospitality of the sage Sutiksna, Rama spent that night at the hermitage, along with Laksmana and Sita.

adharmas tu susüksmeṇa vidhina prapyate mahan

nivṛttena tu Sakyo 'yam vyasanat kamajad iha (9.2)

Early the next morning, Rama took leave of the sage Sutiksna: "Lord, we have spent a blissful night in your holy company, enjoying your hospitality. It is time we moved on before the sun gets too hot." Rama, Laksmana and Sita bowed to the sage who in turn lifted them up and embraced them, as a token of his blessing. He wished them well and requested them to return to his hermitage.

As they were marching into the depth of the forest, Sita found an opportunity to lay her heart before Rama. She said to him: "Lord, you are well acquainted with the bases of dharma, and do not stand in need of any instruction or admonition. However, I know that what appears to be a slight initial neglect often leads to gross violation of dharma. Adharma can only be avoided by one who is able to resist the painful effects of de- sire. These effects are three: the most formidable is falsehood in speech, and then adultery, and the third is unprovoked cruelty. Surely, you are incapable of the first two. I am, however, worried that you may succumb to the third. These ascetics have requested you to kill the demons who live in the Dandaka forest, and you have agreed. Therefore, armed with your weapons and missiles, you are in a hurry to enter the terrible Dandaka forest. I am not quite happy about it. You are armed, and it is possible that you might kill someone without serious- ly meaning to do so.

"Lord, I have heard the following story. In a certain forest lived an ascetic who was an extremely peaceful man of whom even birds and beasts were unafraid. Indra wanted to obstruct this holy man's penance. In the disguise of a warrior, Indra came to the ascetic and on some pretext left his sword with the ascetic with the request to guard it while the soldier was away. The ascetic was zealously guarding the sword and even took it with him when he wandered in the forest. To cut a long story short, after some time the ascetic began to wield the sword, forgetting his vow of non-violence. Keeping a lethal weapon with one is like playing with fire.

"I am anxious, Lord, that this should not happen to you. There is contradiction in an ascetic carrying a weapon; in one who wishes to lead a forest-life but behaves like a warrior. Handling a weapon perverts the mind. I am sure your parents will be delighted if we adhere to a life of dharma. And dharma is not for the pleasure-seeker. Dharma leads to prosperity; dharma itself gives great happiness; everything is gained by dharma, and the world is established in dharma. However, it demands iron will and self-control in order to preserve dharma."

apy aham jivitam jahyam tvam va site salaksmanam

na tu pratijnam samsrutya brahmanebho višesatah (10.19)

Rama was delighted to hear that loving and righteous advice tendered by the tender-hearted Sita. He replied:

"Surely, Sita, you yourself are eager that no one in Dandaka forest should be subjected to suffering. And that is my own wish, too. Sages and ascetics living in the forest came to me. As a prince I am their proper asylum. They sought refuge in me. When they sought my presence, I volunteered to serve them and help them in whatever way I could. They then narrated how they were being harassed in various ways by the cannibalis- tic demons that dwell in the forest. They are the holy brahmanas who are fit to be worshipfully approached by us; yet they came to me, O Sita, seeking my help. How could I refuse their prayer? Therefore, I granted their prayer. They were indeed capable of dealing with the demons themselves. They could destroy the demons by the power of their asceticism. However, such action on their part would be a violation of their vow of asceticism and would therefore destroy the fruits of their penance, as it were. Hence, they do not wish to undertake

the task of punishing the wicked demons. Hence, again, it is my duty to undertake this task.

"Considering all this, I have given them my word that I shall protect them. And, now, having given them my word I can- not go back on it as long as I am alive. I can give up my life, give up Laksmana and even you, my dear Sita; but I cannot abandon the word I have given to anyone, especially to the holy brahmanas, sages and ascetics. Have I made this clear to you, Sita? As a prince, it is my duty to protect the people from evil-doers, and hence even without their request I should offer them such protection. Now these ascetics have actually requested for such protection, and I have promised to do so. There is therefore no going back on this promise at any cost. I shall, however, bear in mind the wise words which you have uttered on account of your great love for me. It is proper that you should so advise me, for you are really and truly my companion in dharma."

Thus speaking to each other, Rama and Sita proceeded towards the hermitages of the sages of the Dandaka forest.

agratah prayayau ramah sita madhye sumadhyama

prsthatastu dhanuspanir laksmanonujagama ha (1)

Rama walked ahead; Sita followed him; and behind them went Laksmana. They admired the mountain peaks, the lakes, the trees, the flowers and the animals that they saw on their way. As they were thus walking, one evening they saw a large lake in which a large herd of elephants was bathing and playing and in which cranes and swans and other aquatic creatures lived free from fear, in utter delight. As Rama came near that lake, he heard delightful music, issuing apparently from the lake itself. He could not see anyone in the neighbourhood. Puzzled at this extraordinary phenomenon, he asked a sage Dharmabhrt who happened to be with the party at that time, to tell him more about the lake.

The sage narrated to Rama the following story: "Rama, this lake was actually created by a renowned ascetic purely by the power of his penance. That sage, known as Mandakarnt, continued to perform his austerities in the lake, living on air, for a great number of years. Even the gods were perturbed: they thought that he wanted to usurp their powers. In order to divert his attention from his penance, the gods commissioned a select band

of five apsaras (celestial nymphs). These nymphs came to this spot and plied their charms on the sage. The sage knew the truth and he fell in love with them, as it were, for the fulfilment of the purpose of the gods. He then created a huge palace within this very lake, in which he still lives along with those five nymphs. Hence this lake is known as Pancapsara lake. The music that you heard is actually the music of these nymphs."

Rama marvelled at the power of penance. Thus he wandered in the forest, visiting one hermitage after another, spending a few weeks in one, a few months in another, enjoying the company and the hospitality of the sages of the forest. As he was thus wandering happily in the forest along with Sita and Laksmana, ten years went by. Once again, he came to the hermit- age of the sage Sutiksna and spent some months in his company.

One day Rama said to Sutiksna: "Holy one, I have heard that the famous sage Agastya lives in this forest. Pray, tell me how we can reach that hermitage. I wish to meet him." Sutiksna replied: "In fact, Rama, I was myself going to ask you to meet Agastya, along with Sita and Laksmana. Luckily, you have yourself expressed the same wish.""

Sutiksna then explained to Rama in great detail how to reach the hermitage of Agastya, and said: "If you wish to meet sage Agastya, better go today itself."

yadaprabheti ca 'kranta dig iyan punyakarmana

tadaprabhṛti nirvairah prasantah pisitasanah (84)

Rama, Laksmana and Sita reached a place surrounded by lofty mountains and dense forest. The pungent smell of pippali fruits confirmed that the site mentioned by Sutiksna was close at hand. The hermitage of the brother of the sage Agastya was near.

At that stage, Rama narrated the story of Agastya to Laks- mana: "There is an interesting story connected with the sage Agastya, Laksmana, and I shall tell you. Two demons inhabited these parts in days of yore. They were Vatapi and Ilvala. Ilvala disguised himself as a brahmana and spoke in a cultured dialect (sanskrt). Thus he attracted the attention of the brahmanas whom he invited to participate in the Sraddha rite for the propitiation of departed ancestors. He would nicely cook his own elder brother Vatapi, disguised as a ram, and serve that meat to the brahmanas, in accordance with

the in- junctions concerning the rite. When they had eaten that meat, he would call out: 'Vatapi, come out.' Vatapi would thereupon tear the bodies of the brahmanas and emerge. The gods prayed to the sage Agastya to put an end to this atrocity. Agastya volunteered himself to eat in Ilvala's house. After the usual meal, Ilvala called 'Vatapi, come out. Agastya serenely said: How can Vatapi come out; he has been digested by me! The furious Ilvala thereupon attacked the sage Agastya who deprived him of his life by a mere look.

"Rid of them and of their kind, O Laksmana, this southern country has prospered."

Soon they reached the hermitage of the brother of Agastya. Warmly received by him, Rama spent that evening there. The next day, he said to Agastya's brother: "I wish to meet your illustrious brother." Taking leave of him, the three proceeded towards the hermitage of Agastya.

Rama pointed out to Laksmana: "See, O Laksmana, this prosperous countryside. All this is due to the grace of the sage Agastya. Since he has rid the country of the demons, people live happily, free from fear. Even people of diabolical disposition have become peaceful and peace-loving. This is due to the grace of sage Agastya. Such is his spiritual power that no sinful man can live in the southern region now. On account of the sage's glory, again, the gods are easily pleased with the worshippers and grant the latter's noble desires." As he was saying this, they arrived at the hermitage of Agastya. And, Rama sent Laksmana to inform the sage of their arrival.

Satahradanam lolatvan Sastranam tiksnatam tatha

garudanilayoh saighryam anugacchanti yositab (13.6)

Laksmana humbly approached a disciple of the sage Agastya and announced: "Rama, the son of the king Dasaratha has arrived here, along with his consort Sita and me his brother and servant. He awaits the pleasure of the sage Agastya to meet him."

As Rama entered the sanctuary, he saw there the sacred altars dedicated to the different gods who are invoked in the Vedic rites. The sage Agastya himself was coming forward to meet Rama. Rama, Laksmana and Sita bowed to the feet of the sage and stood with joined palms. The sage joyously enquired of their welfare and made them sit down, in order that he might

offer them water to wash their hands and feet and food to eat. He said to Rama: "This is the sacred duty of an ascetic, Rama: he should offer worship to the sacred fire and then offer water and food to the guest: or else he incurs great sin, the fruit of which will be to eat his own flesh in the other world." Immediately after they had finished their meal, Agastya brought several rare weapons and missiles and presented them to Rama: all of them had been fashioned by the celestial engineer Visva- karma; and one had been used by lord Visṇu himself and another by Brahma and yet another by Mahendra, etc. After explaining their glories, the sage gave them all to Rama.

The sage then said to Rama: "Rama, I am delighted that you came here to see me. However, I see that all of you are extremely tired, obviously after a long journey. I see that sita needs some rest, too. I am thrilled that she accompanies you. Women are usually fickle-minded and they disown even a husband who has lost his fortune. They say that woman combines in herself the flippancy of lightning, the destructive sharp- ness of a weapon, and the speed of a bird. But, this your wife is free from all these blemishes; indeed she is praiseworthy and ranks with great women like Arundhati."

Rama was happy that he, his brother and also Sita enjoyed the esteem of the mighty sage. He prayed: "Lord, kindly indi- cate a place where we can build a hermitage and spend the rest of the period of our exile." The sage Agastya thereupon re- plied: "Rama, there is a place called Pañcavati not far from here. That is the best place for you to settle down, to spend the balance of your exile. Of course, I know already all that happened in Ayodhya, through intuition. I think that Sita would feel happy to live in Pañcavati, which is near the river Godavari. Living there, you can fulfil the promise given by your father and also offer protection to the weak and the help- less, the sages and the ascetics."

vana ramanyakam yatra jala ramanyakaṁ tatha

samnikrstam ca yatra syat samit-puspa-kušodakam (15.5)

Rama, Laksmana and Sita were proceeding towards Pañcavati. On the way they saw a huge vulture. Rama's first thought was that it was a demon in disguise. The vulture said: "I am your father's friend!" Trusting the vulture's words, Rama asked for details of its birth and ancestry.

The vulture said: "You know that Daksa Prajapati had six- ty daughters and the sage Kasyapa married eight of them. One day Kasyapa said to his wives: 'You will give birth to offspring who will be foremost in the three worlds. Aditi, Diti, Danu and Kalaka listened attentively; the others were indifferent. As a result, the former four gave birth to powerful offspring who were superhuman. Aditi gave birth to thirty- three gods. Diti gave birth to demons. Danu gave birth to Ašvagriva. And, Kalaka had Naraka and Kalika. Of the others, men were born of Manu, and the sub-human species from the other wives of Kasyapa. Tamra's daughter was Suki whose grand- daughter was Vinata who had two sons, Garuda and Aruna. My brother Sampati and I are the sons of Aruna: I offer my services to you, O Rama. If you will be pleased to accept them, I shall guard Sita when you and Laksmana may be away from your hermitage. As you have seen, this formidable forest is full of wild animals and demons, too."

Rama accepted this new friendship. All of them now proceeded towards Pañcavati in search of a suitable place for building a hermitage. Having arrived at Pañcavati, identified by Rama by the description which the sage Agastya had given, Rama said to Laksmapa: "Pray, select a suitable place here for building the hermitage. It should have a charming forest, good water, firewood, flowers and holy grass." Laksmana submitted: "Even if we live together for a hundred years, I shall continue to be your servant. Hence, Lord, you select the place and I shall do the needful." Rejoicing at Laksmana's attitude, Rama pointed to a suitable place, which satisfied all the requisites of a hermitage. Rama said: "This is holy ground; this is charming; it is frequented by beasts and birds. We shall dwell here." Immediately Laksmapa set about building a hermitage for all of them to live in.

Rama warmly embraced Laksmana and said: "I am delighted by your good work and devoted service: and I embrace you in token of such admiration. Brother, you divine the wish of my heart, you are full of gratitude, you know dharma; with such a man as his son, father is not dead but is eternally alive."

Entering that hermitage, Rama, Laksmapa and Sita dwelt in it with great joy and happiness.

navagrayana pujabhir abhyarcya pitr devatah

kṛta 'grayanakah kale santo vigata kalmasah (6)

Time rolled on. One day Laksmana sought the presence of Rama early in the morning and described what he had seen out- side the hermitage. He said: "Winter, the season which you love most, has arrived, O Rama. There is dry cold everywhere; the earth is covered with foodgrains. Water is uninviting; and fire is pleasant. The first fruits of the harvest have been brought in; and the agriculturists have duly offered some of it to the gods and the manes, and thus reaffirmed their indebted- ness to them. The farmer who thus offers the first fruits to gods and manes is freed from sin.

"The sun moves in the southern hemisphere; and the north looks lustreless. Himalaya, the abode of snow, looks even more so! It is pleasant to take a walk even at noon. The shade of a tree which we loved in summer is unpleasant now. Early in the morning the earth, with its rich wheat and barley fields, is enveloped by mist. Even so, the rice crop. The sun, even when it rises, looks soft and cool like the moon. Even the elephants which approach the water, touch it with their trunk but pull the trunk quickly away on account of the coldness of the water.

"Rama, my mind naturally thinks of our beloved brother Bharata. Even in this cold winter, he who could command the luxury of a king, prefers to sleep on the floor and live an ascetic life. Surely, he, too, would have got up early in the morning and has perhaps had a cold bath in the river Sarayu. What a noble man! I can even now picture him in front of me: with eyes like the petals of a lotus, dark brown in colour, slim and without an abdomen, as it were. He knows what dharma is. He speaks the truth. He is modest and self-controlled, al- ways speaks pleasantly, is sweet-natured, with long arms and with all his enemies fully subdued. That noble Bharata has given up all his pleasures and is devoted to you. He has already won his place in heaven, Rama. Though he lives in the city; yet, he has adopted the ascetic mode of life and follows you in spirit.

"We have heard it said that a son takes after his mother in nature: but in the case of Bharata this has proved false. I wonder how Kaikeyi, in spite of having our father as her husband, and Bharata as her son, has turned out to be so cruel."

When Laksmana said this, Rama stopped him, saying: "Do not speak 111 of our mother Kaikeyi, Laksmana. Talk only of our beloved Bharata. Even

though I try not to think of Ayodhya and our people there, when I think of Bharata, I wish to see him."

krürair anaryaih saumitre parihasah kathamcana

na karyah pasya vaidehim kathamcit saumya jivitam (18.19)

After their bath and morning prayers, Rama, Laksmana and Stta returned to their hermitage. As they were seated in their hut, there arrived upon the scene a dreadful demoness. She looked at Rama and immediately fell in love with him! He had a handsome face; she had an ugly face. He had a slender waist; she had a huge abdomen. He had lovely large eyes; she had hideous eyes. He had lovely soft hair; she had red hair. He had a lovable form; she had a terrible form. He had a sweet voice; hers resembled the barking of a dog. He was young; she was haughty. He was able; her speech was crooked. He was of noble conduct; she was of evil conduct. He was beloved; she had a forbidding appearance. Such a demoness spoke to Rama: "Who are you, young men; and what are both of you doing in this forest, with this lady?"

Rama told her the whole truth about himself, Laksmana and Sita, about his banishment from the kingdom, etc. Then Rama asked her: "o charming lady, now tell me who you are." At once the demoness replied: "Ah, Rama! I shall tell you all about my- self immediately. I am Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana. I am sure you have heard of him. He has two other brothers, Kumbha- karna and Vibhisana. Two other brothers Khara and Dusapa live in the neighbourhood here. The moment I saw you, I fell in love with you. What have you to do with this ugly, emaciated sita? Marry me. Both of us shall roam about this forest. Do not worry about Sita or Laksmana: I shall swallow them in a moment." But, Rama smilingly said to her: "You see I have my wife with me here. Why do you not propose to my brother Laksmana who has no wife here?" Surpanakha did not mind that suggestion. She turn- ed to Laksmana and said: "It is all right. You please marry me and we shall roam about happily." She was tormented by passion.

Laksmana said in a teasing mood: "O lady, you see that I am only the slave of Rama and Sita. Why do you choose to be the wife of a slave? You will only become a servant-maid. Per- suade Rama to send away that ugly wife of his and marry you. " Surpanakha turned to Rama again. She said: "Unable to give up this wife of yours, Sita, you turn down my offer. See, I shall at once swallow her. When she is gone you will marry me; and we shall roam

about in this forest happily." So saying, she actually rushed towards Sita. Rama stopped her in time, and said to Laksmana: "What are you doing, Laksmana? It is not right to jest with cruel and unworthy people. Look at the plight of Sita. She barely escaped with her life. Come, quickly deform this demoness and send her away.

Laksmana drew his sword and quickly cut off the nose and the ears of Surpanakha. Weeping and bleeding she ran away. She went to her brother Khara and fell down in front of him.

yuşman papatmakan hantum viprakaran mahahave

rsinam tu niyogena praptoham sašarayudhah (20.9)

The demon Khara was distressed to see his sister Surpanakha fallen unconscious in front of him, bleeding profusely From the wounds to her nose and her ears inflicted by Laksmana. Kneeling near her. Khara said in great anger: "Whose work is this? O my sister, you yourself are equal in prowess to the gods and demi-gods. Which foolish person has perpetrated this stupid action, thus inviting speedy death at my hands? Surely. not even Indra the god of gods would dare to offend me. Sürpanakha, regain consciousness and tell me who it is that has elected to die at my hands today."

Still dazed, Surpanakha regained consciousness and said to Khara: "Today I saw in the forest two young, handsome, power- ful men who had eyes resembling lotus petals, who were clad in bark of trees and deer-skin, who are living on fruits and roots like ascetics, who are devoted to self-control and austerities, and who are celibates: they are the sons of king Dasaratha, and are known as Rama and Laksmana. Along with them I also saw a beautiful young woman decked in jewels. And this is the result. Brother, you will do me a great favour if you have them killed: I wish to drink their blood."

Terribly enraged, Khara ordered fourteen of his demoniacal warriors: "Two men have dared to enter this Dandaka forest. Go and kill them, and kill also the woman who is with them. Thus propitiate my sister. Let her drink the blood of those humans." The fourteen demons, accompanied by Surpanakha, immediately proceeded to where Rama lived. They saw Rama.

And, Rama saw them, too. He said to Laksmana: "Look after Sita, Laksmana; I shall quickly deal with these demons and return."

Rama said to the demons: "We are ascetics who live here on fruits and roots. Why do you thus harass us? Also bear in mind that, requested by the sages and ascetics who are constantly tormented by you, we are here to kill sinners like you." The demons replied: "Having provoked our great Leader Khara,you have surely forfeited your life. See, with these our weapons we shall kill you in no time." Saying so, they rushed towards Rama with their lances and swords uplifted. Rama cut those weapons down with his own missiles. Then he shot them with fourteen blunt missiles which pierced their hearts. They fell down dead.

Horrified to see this quick work, Sürpanakha ran back to Khara.

buddhyaham anupasyami na tvam ramasya samyuge

sthatum pratimukhe Sakttah sabalopi maharane

Suramant na sorastvan mithyaropita vikramah (21.17)

Seeing Surpanakha rolling on the ground in front of him once more, Khara sharply demanded: "Why are you doing this to me? I have just now despatched the most formidable heroes of my army who will certainly kill those humans in no time. Those fourteen heroes are utterly faithful to me and are in- vincible in battle. Just have a little patience and give up this unnecessary emotionalism." Surpanakha replied: "True," you sent those fourteen heroes with me a little while ago. But they are no more! With all their might they did attack Rama and Lakşmapa. They hurled their weapons with all their strength. But they are no more! With their hearts pierced by Rama's missiles, they are lying dead. Having seen them thus lying dead and having seen the extraordinary prowess of Rama, I have come again to you deeply distressed. If the demons of Dandaka forest are to be saved in time, you should take some quick action. But, my own intelligence tells me that you have no strength to face Rama. You think you are mighty, but in fact you are not. It is a disgrace and it is a great calamity if you are unable to deal with these human beings. They will sure- ly and soon destroy all the demons, including you my brother."

Stung to the quick by her words, Khara said: "You will see how powerful I am. I account the human Rama for nothing. By his own wicked deed in

provoking me to battle he is as good as dead. I will instantly cut him down with my axe; and you will drink his blood." Surpanakha was delighted with this assurance and began to praise him and inspire him. Khara then instructed his chief of staff Düşana: "Order the fourteen thou- sand demons to get ready to march immediately. Bring my chariot, too, immediately. I wish to proceed at the head of the glorious Paulastya forces to destroy the humans who have dared to challenge us.

Soon the chariot, shining like the very sun, was brought and Khara ascended it. And, soon the mighty demoniacal army was ready, too. This army was equipped with all sorts of weapons iron clubs, lances, maces. Preceded by this mighty army, Khara the demon of great prowess marched to where Rama was, eager to fight the human enemy.

tasya kruddhasya rupah tu ramasya dadrie tada

daksasyeva kratum hantum udyatasya pinakinah (24.36)

The entire nature seemed to be against the demons. Evil omens foreboding the destruction of the demons appeared every- where. Animals wailed. Fearful and evil-looking clouds were seen in the sky. The sun was surrounded by a red ring. A dreadful darkness prevailed on earth. People were confused and did not know one direction from another. There was an untimely eclipse of the sun. The earth trembled. There were dust-storms and hail-storms. Evil omens appeared on the person of Khara, too. His left arm throbbed. There was pain on his forehead. But, none of these had, however, the least effect upon him! He had great confidence in his own strength. He said: "I do not worry like weaklings: for I am strong. I can even shoot down the stars. I will not return from here without having killed Rama, Laksmana and Sita. I am invincible, and I have never been defeated in battle by anyone. I shall propitiate my sister who has been disgraced by Rama and Laksmana." He roared as he marched towards Rama's hermitage. Hearing this, the sages and the demi-gods prayed for Rama's victory.

Khara was surrounded by twelve demons of great valour. Dusana was accompanied by four great demons.

Rama, too, noticed the evil omens and said to Laksmana: "Look at these upheavals in nature which foretell the destruct- ion of the demons, O Laksmana. My missiles are getting excited at the prospect of being made

proper use of today. I see that your face is radiant: and from that I infer that we shall be victorious. For, he whose face is lustreless on the eve of a battle shall be slain. Ah, Laksmana, I can hear the tumult caused by the advancing forces of the demons. A wise man should take proper precautions against even a calamity which has not yet befallen him. I therefore wish that Sita and you would take shelter in yonder cave, while I deal with these hordes of de- mons. I know that you are capable of killing all of them: but, this time I wish to do that myself. And, now please go." Laksmana immediately left for the cave along with Sita. Rama was pleased with this implicit obedience.

Rama readied his weapons and his missiles. The gods and the sages who were witnessing the scene blessed him. Some of them were worried: "How will Rama who is single-handed be able to deal with fourteen thousand demons?" The demons were soon within sight. Rama looked around and had a good view of the demoniacal hordes. In anger, the charming countenance of Rama took on the aspect of Rudra when he was about to destroy the ritual of Daksa.

Sara ndhakaram akasam avṛnot sadivakaram

babhuva 'vasthito ramah pravamann iva tan saran (40)

Khara and his mighty army reached the hermitage of Rama. Khara saw Rama standing with his weapon ready to fire. He com- manded his charioteer: "Take my chariot right in front of Rama himself." Going right up to Rama, Khara began to attack Rama with a volley of small fire. Having done so, the demon roared aloud. The followers of Khara, who were cruel by nature, began to hurl a number of conventional weapons at Rama as also branches of trees and stones. In large numbers, the demons stampeded towards the hermitage in order to hit and to kill Rama. Surrounded by them, Rama looked like the great god Rudra surrounded by his own servants!

Rama's body had sustained many injuries, but they were not serious. Yet, he resembled the setting sun whose lustre was partially hidden by the evening clouds. Seeing this the gods, the demi-gods and sages were worried. Greatly enraged by this sudden attack, Rama wielded his revolving weapon, which released hundreds and thousands of missiles. These missiles were Nalikas (those which had a steel-point), Naracas (wholly made of steel) and Vikarnis (missiles with a barbed body). The demons fell like flies. Rama's missiles cut down the conventional weapons of the demons. Hit by the missiles, the

demons' skulls were broken, their sheilds and bows were torn away from them -- and they fell like trees to the ground. They in turn hurled lances, and axes and other such weapons at him; but these were powerless against Rama's weapons. Thus assailed by Rama, the demons who survived retreated and ran to Khara for shelter.

Greatly perturbed that, single-handed, Rama could kill thousands of the demons, Dusana advanced towards Rama. The re- treating forces also returned to give battle to Rama, hurling logs of wood and stones. Rama roared aloud in triumph and used the most powerful Gandharva-missile which threw the demons into utter confusion. Immediately, he returned to his revolving weapon and discharged hundreds of missiles in all directions at the same time. Such was the effect of the Gandharva-missile and such was the speed with which Rama discharged the missiles, that the demons did not see the missiles but only saw Rama hold- ing the weapon. Even he did not seem to be doing anything; the firing seemed to be automatic. And Rama himself was hidden behind the fire by which even the sun was hidden.

The entire ground was strewn with the bodies of the dead demons. Their weapons had been broken; and even the stones hurled by them had been powdered. They had been utterly defeated.

caturdasa sahasrani raksasam bhima karmanam

hatany ekena ramena manuseṇa padatina (36)

Distressed to see his men fall in their thousands, Duşana commanded a battalion of specially chosen commandos to fight with and kill Rama. They charged. The weapons they used were iron pikes, swords, slabs of stone and trees, and some arrows. Rama intercepted and destroyed all these with his missiles.

Now Duşana himself came forward. Rama covered him with his missiles; but Düşana returned the fire with equal effect. With extraordinary dexterity, however, Rama destroyed Dusana's weapon. At the same time, Rama broke the head of Dusana's charioteer and cut down the horses. Now both Rama and Düşana were without a chariot. Picking up a heavy weapon made of steel, gold and diamond and barbed wire, Düşana rushed towards Rama. With extraordinary accuracy Rama cut off both the arms of Dusapa; and they fell down still holding the steel club.

The three commanders of Dusapa's forces now advanced to fight Rama. One wielded a terrible looking pike, the other a scimitar, and the third an axe. Even as they were coming towards him, Rama cut them down. Mahakapala's skull was broken. With numerous missiles, Rama overpowered (pramatha) Pramathi. And he shot the eyes of Sthulaksa.*

The demon Khara was mad with rage. He shouted at the remaining forces; "Look at this disgrace! Look how the mighty Dusana has been slain by a puny human being! And yet all of you are just looking on. Come, attack this Rama and destroy him at once."

The other demons rushed towards Rama, and he quickly disposed of all of them, using missiles which resembled fire and which were adorned with gold and diamond. His missiles were never wasted. If there were a hundred demons; he used a hundred missiles. If there were a thousand demons he used a thousand missiles and destroyed them all.

Thus, single-handed, fighting as a foot-soldier, this human being, Rama, killed fourteen thousand demons who were of terrible deeds. Only Khara and another demon known as Trisira survived.

Sarajala vrtah suryo na tada sma prakasate

anyonya vadha samranbhad ubhayoh samprayudhyatoh (28.9)

When Khara went forward to fight with Rama, the demon Trisira approached him and sought permission to go instead. He said to Khara: "I swear that either I shall kill him or I shall be killed by him. I assure you that either you will return to Janasthana, happy that I had killed Rama, or, seeing that he has killed me, you will encounter Rama yourself. But, let me go first." Khara approved of the idea.

The demon Trisira was very powerful and was quick to take the offensive. He hit Rama on the forehead with his weapon. Though injured, Rama took it as if he had been hit with flowers. He was greatly enraged. With his weapon Rama discharged four missiles which had curved tips, and these took care of the horses. With eight missiles, he cut down the charioteer. As Trisira was jumping from the chariot, Rama shot him in his heart and he was dead.

Khara came forward. He was endowed with very powerful weapons; and he had been instructed in the use of extremely powerful missiles, too. Sitting

in his chariot, Khara dis- charged many missiles at Rama. Correctly judging the strength of the enemy, Rama also armed himself with a powerful weapon. Then began the most fierce battle between Rama and Khara. The fire that emanated from both of them obscured the very sun that shone above. Khara used the missiles Nalikas, Naracas and Vikarnis towards Rama. Rama actually appeared to be fatigued and severely wounded. Taking advantage of this situation, Khara approached Rama intent upon killing him. With first-class marks- manship, he knocked down Rama's weapon with a single shot. When Rama had thus been disarmed, Khara took immediate advantage of this and riddled Rama with various missiles. The impact of these missiles was so great that the protective armour which Rama had worn broke and fell down. Some of the missiles reached the vital parts of Rama's body, too.

With irrepressible anger, Rama now took up the 'weapon of Visnu that the sage Agastya had recently given him. Grasping it firmly, Rama rushed at Khara and fired six times. With one shot he hit Khara's head, with two he hit his arms, and three he aimed at Khara's chest. At the same time, Rama hit the chariot with one shot which broke the yoke, four shots were fired at the horses, and the sixth took care of the charioteer.

But the demon Khara was not slain yet. Deprived of his chariot, he jumped down and, mace in hand, he rushed towards Rama.

kala paša pariksipta bhavanti puruşa hi ye

karyakaryam na jananti te nirasta sad indriyah (30.15)

As Khara thus advanced, mace in hand, Rama said to him: "O demon, you have to your credit immeasurable sin; the sin of tormenting and killing innocent hermits and ascetics.Even if one is the lord of the three worlds, such a sinner is fit to be shunned by all. You are about to reap the fruit of that sin. For, in this world the painful fruits of sins quickly follow, even as the results of having partaken of poisoned food. I consider that my father's real intention in sending me to the forest was to exterminate cruel and sinful demons like you. Soon I shall despatch you from this world. Soon, you will behold the same ascetics you tortured and killed: they will be going to heaven and you will be thrown into hell."

Khara made a suitable reply. He said: "You have so far killed only demons of ordinary strength. You, therefore, think that you are powerful! Do not boast. Real heroes and strong men do not boast. Their actions speak for them." After saying this, Khara immediately hurled that terrible mace at Rama, Burning everything that was on its path, the mace near- ed Rama. Rama released an anti-missile missile which intercepted the mace and broke it.

Rama asked Khara: "Is that all you can do? The mace has been destroyed. Now be ready to meet your own fate. When you have been laid to permanent sleep, this Dandaka forest will once again become the resort of holy men who are the refuge of all the people of the world." Khara replied to Rama: "I think because your end is near you do not know what to say and what not to say. During the last hour of their life, people lose their power of discrimination and do not know what to do and what not to do." However, with his mace de- stroyed by Rama, Khara was unarmed. He looked around for a weapon to use. He uprooted a big tree and hurled it at Rama. Rama intercepted the tree with his missile. With a volley of a thousand shots, Rama riddled the body of Khara. Even then the wicked demon did not die but came closer to Rama. Rama retreated two or three paces. He picked up the most fierce missile which the sage Agastya had given him. Hit by it, Khara fell down dead.

The sages sang Rama's glory: "In just one hour and a half you have destroyed fourteen thousand dreadful demons. Wonderful is your strength." They said: "It was for this purpose alone that the sages Sarabhanga and Sutiksna clever- ly suggested that you should dwell here. Freed from fear, the sages will practise austerities here." They blessed Rama. Delighted to witness his exploits, Sita embraced Rama.

samhrtya va punar lokan vikramena mahayasah

Sakttah sa purusavyaghrah srastum punar apt prajan (26)

One of the demons who had escaped earlier (Akampana) proceeded direct to Lanka and informed Ravana.

Surprised and angered, Ravana questioned Akampana: "Who dares to do such a foolish action? Which foolish being, human or superhuman, can afford to antagonise me? Not even Indra, nor Kubera the son of Visrava, nor

even the lord Visnu himself, can be happy, after antagonising me! I am death unto death it- self. Even the wind and the fire are afraid of me. Tell me truly: who perpetrated this crime?"

With trembling limbs, Akampana said: "Lord, it is the young son of king Dasaratha. It is Rama who is so powerful that in front of him the demoniacal hordes fell in their hun- dreds and thousands. They were so terrified that in whichever direction they ran afraid to face him, they saw him in that direction! The missiles he discharged came towards the demons like fire-hooded snakes spitting fire." Ravana jumped up saying: "Oh, is that so? I shall immediately go to Janasthana and kill that Rama."

Akampana continued: "That is not so easy, Lord. You do not know the power of Rama. You cannot conquer him in battle. He can break up the firmament and bring the stars, the moon and the planets down. And he can lift up the whole earth. Nay, Lord, he can destroy the entire creation and create everything anew. But T shall tell you how he can be overcome. He has a most beautiful wife named Sita. She excels even the celestials in beauty: there is of course no mortal who is as beautiful as she is. If you can trick Rama away and abduct her, you can bring about the death of Rama. For, Rama will not live without sita."

This plot appealed to Ravana. The next morning, Ravana got into his chariot and rode towards Janasthana where he met the demon Marica. Ravana said to Marica: "Friend, my brother Khara and all the demons of Janasthana have been killed by Rama, the son of king Dasaratha. To take revenge, I have decided to abduct Sita and thus bring about the death of Rama. I need your help." Marica shuddered at the very thought. "O chief of demons, who has tendered you such destructive advice? Surely he is not your friend. He who has given you this advice and inspires you to abduct Sita is your worst enemy: obviously, he wants you to pull out the fangs of a cobra he is afraid of! Pray, leave Rama alone and do not provoke him. Pray, leave Sita alone: enjoy the company of your own wives, and let Rama enjoy the company of his wife, Sita."

Ravana returned to Lanka.

deva danava gandharva pisaca patago ragaih

abhayah yasya sañgrame mṛtyuto manusad rte (32.18)

Surpanakha witnessed the wholesale destruction of the demons of Janasthana, including their supreme leader Khara. Stricken with terror, she ran to Lanka. There she saw her brother Ravana, the ruler of Lanka, seated with his ministers in a palace whose roof scraped the sky. Ravana had twenty arms, ten heads, was broad chested and endowed with all the physical qualifications of a monarch. He had previously fought with the gods, even with their chief Indra. He was well versed in the science of warfare and knew the use of the celestial missiles in battle. He had been hit by the gods, even by the discus (revolver) of lord Visnu, but he did not die. For, he had performed breath-taking austerities for a period of ten thousand years, and offered his own heads in worship to Brahma the creator and earned from him the boon that he would not be kill- ed by any superhuman or subhuman agency (except by man). Emboldened by this boon, the demon had tormented the gods and particularly the sages.

Surpanakha entered Ravana's presence, clearly displaying the physical deformity which Laksmana had caused to her. She shouted at Ravana in open assembly: "Brother, you have become so thoroughly infatuated and addicted to sense-pleasure that you are unfit to be a king any longer. The people lose all respect for the king who is only interested in his own pleasure and neglects his royal duties. People turn away from the king who has no spies, who has lost touch with the people and whom they cannot see, and who is unable to do what is good for them. It is the employment of spies that makes the king 'far-sighted' for through these spies he sees quite far. You have failed to appoint proper spies to collect intelligence for you. Therefore, you do not know that fourteen thousand of your people have been slaughtered by a human being. Even Khara and Dasana have been killed by Rama. And, Rama has assured the ascetics of Janas- thana which is your territory, that the demons shall not do them any harm. They are now protected by him. Yet, here you are: revelling in little pleasures!

"O brother, even a piece of wood, a clod of earth or just dust, has some use; but when a king falls from his position he is utterly useless. But that monarch who is vigilant, who has knowledge of everything, through his spies, who is self-controll- ed, who is full of gratitude and whose conduct is righteous -- he rules for a long time. Wake up and act before you lose your sovereignty."

This made Ravana reflect.

yasya sita bhaved bharya yam ca harta parişvajet

atijivet sa sarveşu lokeşv api purandarat (34.19)

And, Ravana's anger was roused. He asked Sorpanakha: "Tell me, who is it that disfigured you thus? What do you think of Rama? Why has he come to Dandaka forest?"

Surpanakha gave an exact and colourful description of the physical appearance of Rama. She said: "Rama is equal in charm to Cupid himself. At the same time, he is a formidable warrior. When he was fighting the demons of Janasthana, I could not see what he was doing; I only saw the demons falling dead on the field. You can easily understand when I tell you that within an hour and a half he had killed fourteen thousand demons. He spared me, perhaps because he did not want to kill a woman. He has a brother called Laksmana who is equally powerful. He is Rama's right hand man and alter ego; Rama's own life-force mov- ing outside his body. Oh, you must see Sita, Rama's wife. I have not seen even a celestial nymph who could match her in beauty. He who has her for his wife, whom she fondly embraces, he shall indeed be the ruler of gods. She is a fit bride for you; and you are indeed the most suitable suitor for her. In fact, I wanted to bring that beautiful Sita here so that you could marry her: but Laksmana intervened and cruelly mutilated my body. If you could only look at her for a moment, you would immediately fall in love with her. If this proposal appeals to you, take some action quickly and get her here."

Ravana was instantly tempted. Immediately he ordered his amphibian vehicle to be got ready. This vehicle which was rich- ly adorned with gold, could move freely wherever its owner willed. Its front part resembled mules with fiendish heads. Ravana took his seat in this vehicle and moved towards the sea- coast. The coastline of Lanka was dotted with hermitages in- habited by sages and also celestial and semi-divine beings. It was also the pleasure resort of celestials and nymphs who went there to sport and to enjoy themselves. Driving at great speed through them, Ravana passed through caravan parks scattered with the space vehicles of the celestials. He also drove through dense forests of sandal trees, banana plantations and cocoanut palm groves. In those forests there were also spices and aromatic plants. Along the coast lay pearls and precious stones. He passed through cities which had an air of opulence.

Ravana crossed the ocean in his amphibian vehicle and reached the hermitage where Marica was living in ascetic garb, subsisting on a disciplined diet. Marica welcomed Ravana and questioned him about the purpose of his visit.

sulabhah puruşa rajan satatam priyavadinah

apriyasya ca pathyasya vaktta srota ca durlabhah (37.2)

Ravana said to Marica: "Listen, Marica. You know that fourteen thousand demons, including my brother Khara and the great warrior Triŝira have been mercilessly killed by Rama and Laksmana who have now promised their protection to the ascetics of Dandaka forest, thus flouting our authority. Driven out of his country by his angry father, obviously for a dis- graceful action, this unrighteous and hard-hearted prince Rama has killed the demons without any justification. And, they have even dared to disfigure my beloved sister Surpanakha. I must immediately take some action to avenge the death of my brother and to restore our prestige and our authority. I need your help; kindly do not refuse this time.

"Disguising yourself as a golden deer of great beauty, roam near the hermitage of Rama. Sita would surely be attracted, and she would ask Rama and Laksmana to capture you. When they go after you, leaving Sita alone in the hermitage, I shall easily abduct Sita." Even as Ravana was unfolding this plot, Marica's mouth became dry and parched with fear. Trembling with fear, Marica said to Ravapa:

"O king, one can easily get in this world a counsellor who tells you what is pleasing to you; but hard it is to find a wise counsellor who tells you the unpleasant truth which is good for you and harder it is to find one who heeds such advice. Surely, your intelligence machine is faulty and therefore you have no idea of the prowess of Rama. Else, you would not talk of abducting Sita. I wonder: perhaps Sita has come into this world to end your life, or perhaps there is to be great sorrow on account of Sita, or perhaps maddened by lust, you are going to destroy yourself and the demons and Lanka itself. Oh, no, you were wrong in your estimation of Rama. He is not wicked; he is righteousness incarnate. He is not cruel hearted; he is generous to a fault. He has not been disgraced and exiled from the kingdom. He is here to honour the promise his father had given his mother Kaikeyi, after joyously renouncing his kingdom.

"O king, when you entertain ideas of abducting Sita you are surely playing with fire. Please remember: when you stand facing Rama, you are standing face to face with your own death. Sita is the beloved wife of Rama, who is extremely powerful. Nay, give up this foolish idea. What will you gain by thus gambling with your sovereignty over the demons, and with your life it-self? Please consult the noble Vibhisana, and your virtuous ministers before embarking upon such unwise projects. They will surely advise you against them."

vrkse vrkse ca pasymi cira kṛsna jina 'mbaram

grhita dhanusam ramam pasahastam iva 'ntakam

ramabhutam idam sarvam aranyam pratibhati me (39.15-16)

Marica continued: "I shall tell you of my own personal en- counters with Rama. Long ago, I was young and energetic, mighty and proud of my strength. I had the terrible form of a huge cloud. I used to be the terror of ascetics in the forest. I would desecrate their sacred rituals. Once the sage Visvamitra was about to perform a sacred rite. In order to protect it from our disturbance, he approached king Dasaratha and demanded the services of Rama to guard the altar. Dasaratha pleaded that Rama was too young to do so. Yet, Visvamitra assured the king that though young, Rama was the only one capable of dealing with demons, and took Rama to his hermitage.

"While the sacred rite was in progress, I went to the hermitage as usual. Seeing the young boy Rama outside, I tried to enter. But Rama aimed one missile at me, by which I was hurled a long distance, into the ocean! Rama could do that even when he was no more than a child! How can we measure his present strength? And, how can you meet him in battle? Surely, if you decide to go ahead with your plot all of us will suffer. In this world, people suffer on account of others' sins, too, just as fish living in a pond infested with snakes suffer. It is a great sin to commit adultery. Desist from it and enjoy your own wives, O King.

"Hear of the second encounter I had with Rama, more recently. I was roaming in the forest with a couple of other demons, molesting and killing ascetics and drinking their blood. During the course of our wandering we came to where Rama lived at that time. Assuming the form of a deer, I rushed at Rama, thinking that since he was living in the forest as an ascetic

he would be powerless and weak. He took his weapon and dis- charged a couple of missiles at us. I had tasted the fruit of Rama's wrath before: I fled and Rama did not pursue me. The others were killed.

"Thus saved miraculously for the second time, I have abandoned cruelty and am now living here as an ascetic, practising yoga and self-control. I see Rama alone in every tree, holding his weapon. The whole forest appears as Rama to me. Even words which commence with the syllable 'ra' like ratna, ratha -- frighten me. He can easily kill all your soldiers and generals, Ŏ King; entertain no doubt about that. I know his prowess at first hand. If you antagonise him, many innocent people also will suffer. Rama will surely exterminate the entire demon-race. If Rama killed Khara, it was Khara's fault that he provoked Rama and invited a fight. If you do not accept my advice O King, we shall all perish."

mam nihatya tu ramo 'sav acirat tvam vadhisyati

anena kṛta krtyo 'smi mriye yad arina hatah (41.17)

Marica's advice was unpalatable to Ravana. He would not take it, even as one who wants to die will refuse to take a wholesome remedy. On the other hand, he severely reprimanded Marica. He said: "Your advice is 111-conceived and useless. You cannot stop me from abducting Sita who is dearer than life to Rama and without whom Rama would not live. What you have said would have been proper if I had asked you for counsel: I do not want your counsel now, I want implicit obedience to my command. I am sorry, Marica, that you do not know how to behave towards the king. You should speak to the king words which are not unfavourable, softly spoken, and beneficial and even then humbly and politely. Kings are like fire, Indra (king of gods), the moon, Yama (the god of death), and Varuna (the god of water). Therefore, the kings possess the fierceness of fire, the lordliness of Indra, the gentleness of the moon, the ruthlessness of Yama and the fluidity of water. Hence, one should behave cautiously with kings. I did not ask you for your counsel but I am asking you to do this job for me. If you do this, I shall bestow half the kingdom of Lanka upon you; if you refuse, 1 shall kill you just now. Better make up your mind to obey. Take the form of a golden deer and tempt Sita. At her request surely Rama would pursue you. After leading him away, shout: O Sita, O Laksmana'. Hearing this Laksmana will also go in search of Rama, leaving Sita alone. At this time I shall easily take

Sita away. It may be true that this involves risk to your life; but death is certain if you disobey me."

In spite of this threat, Marica fearlessly advised Ravana again: "He who gave you this suggestion is a great sinner. it is the ministers duty to give proper advice to the king: your ministers have failed in this duty and should be executed. When a king embarks upon evil his ministers should restrain him: your ministers have not done this. A minister who does this earns the grace of the Lord and through that wealth and happiness. If he does not do this, and the king pursues his evil way, everyone, including the ministers, suffer. Ministers who encourage their king to indulge in violence and evil, are them- selves destroyed along with the king. For what the king does inevitably involves all his subjects who also suffer the consequences. If I do what you say, Rama will surely and swiftly kill me; and soon after that he will kill you also. But then, I shall deem myself blessed and I shall have met my end at the hands of Rama himself, which is preferable. If you take away Sita to Lanka, rest assured that that is the end of yourself. Neither the demons, nor Lanka will survive."

adṛṣṭa pürvam tam drstva nanaratnamayam megam

vismayam paramam sita jagama janakatmaja (35)

Ravana was determined, and Marica knew that there was no use arguing with him. Hence, after the last-minute attempt to avert the catastrophe, Marica said to Ravana: "What can I do when you are so wicked? I am ready to go to Rama's asrama. God help you!" Not minding the taunt, Ravana expressed his un- abashed delight at Marica's consent. He applauded Marica and said: "That is the spirit, my friend: you are now the same old Marica that I knew. I guess you had been possessed by some evil spirit a few minutes ago, on account of which you had begun to preach a different gospel. Let us swiftly get into this vehicle and proceed to our destination. As soon as you have accomplished the purpose, you are free to go and to do what you please!"

Both of them got into the amphibian vehicle which behaved like an aerial car (for it was in fact a hovercraft), and quickly left the hermitage of Marica. Once again they passed for- ests, hills, rivers and cities: and soon they reached the neighbourhood of the hermitage of Rama. They got down from that hovercraft which had been embellished with gold. Holding Marica by

the hand, Ravana said to him: "Over there is the hermitage of Rama, surrounded by banana plantations. Well, now, get going with the work for which we have come here. "Immediately Marica transformed himself into an attractive deer. It was extraordinary, totally unlike any deer that inhabited the forest. It was unique. It dazzled like a huge gem stone. Each part of its body had a different colour. The colours had an unearthly brilliance and charm. Thus embellished by the colours of all the precious stones, the deer which was the demon Marica in disguise, roamed about near the hermitage of Rama, nibbling at the grass now and then. At one time it came close to Sita; then it ran away and joined the other deer grazing at a distance. It was very playful, jumping about and chasing its tail and spinning around. Sita went out to gather flowers. She cast a glance at that extraordinary and unusual deer. As she did so, the deer too, sensing the accomplishment of the mission, came closer to her. Then it ran away, pretending to be afraid. Sita marvelled at the very appearance of this un- usual deer the lime of which she had not seen before and which had the hue of jewels.

JIvan na yadi te 'bhyeti grahanam mṛgasattamah

ajinam narasardüla ruciram me bhavisyati (19)

From where she was gathering flowers, Sita, filled with wonder to see that unusual deer, called out to Rama: "Come quick and see, O Lord; come with your brother. Look at this extraordinary creature. I have never seen such a beautiful deer before." Rama and Laksmana looked at the deer, and Laksmana's suspicions were aroused: i am suspicious; I think it is the same demon Marica in disguise. I have heard that Marica could assume any form at will, and through such tricks he had brought death and destruction to many ascetics in this forest. Surely, this deer is not real: no one has heard of a deer with rainbow colours, each one of its limbs shining resplendent with the colour of a different gem! That itself should enable us to understand that it is a demon, not an animal."

Sita interrupted Laksmana's talk, and said: "Never mind, one thing is certain; this deer has captivated my mind. It is such a dear. I have not seen such an animal near our hermitage! There are many types of deer which roam about near the hermitage; this is just an extraordinary and unusual deer. It is superlative in all respects: its colour is lovely, its texture is lovely, and even its voice sounds delightful. It would be a wonderful feat if it could

be caught alive. We could use it as a pet, to divert our minds. Later we could take it to Ayodhya: and I am sure all your brothers and mothers would just adore it. If it is not possible to capture it alive, O Lord, then it can be killed, and I would love to have its skin. I know I am not behaving myself towards both of you: but I am helpless; I have lost my heart to that deer. I am terribly curious."

In fact, Rama was curious, too! And so, he took Sita's side and said to Laksmana: "It is beautiful, Laksmana. It is unusual. I have never seen a creature like this. And, princes do hunt animals and cherish their skins. By sporting and hunt- ing kings acquire great wealth! People say that that is real wealth which one pursues without premeditation. So, let us try to get the deer or its skin. If, as you say, it is a demon in disguise, then surely it ought to be killed by me, just as Vatapi who was tormenting and destroying sages and ascetics was justly killed by the sage Agastya. Vatapi fooled the ascetics till he met the sage Agastya. This Marica, too, has fooled the ascetics so far: till coming to me today! The very beauty of his hide is his doom. And, you, Laksmana, please guard Sita with great vigilance, till I kill this deer with just one shot and bring the hide along with me."

vimuktta dharmas capalas tiksna bhedakarah striyab

na sahe hidṛsam vakyam vaidehi janakatmaje (45.30)

Rama took his weapons and went after the strange deer. As soon as the deer saw him pursuing it, it started to run away. Now it disappeared, now it appeared to be very near, now it ran fast, now it seemed confused -- thus it led Rama far away from his hermitage. Rama was fatigued, and needed to rest. As he was standing under a tree, intrigued by the actions of the mysterious deer, it came along with other deer and began to graze not far from him. When Rama once again went for it, it ran away. Not wishing to go farther nor to waste more time, Rama took his weapon and fitted the missile of Brahma to it and fired. This missile pierced the illusory deer-mask and into the very heart of the demon. Marica uttered a loud cry, leapt high into the sky and then dropped dead onto the ground. As he fell, however, he remembered Ravana's instructions and, assuming the voice of Rama cried aloud: "Rey Sita; Hey Laksmana."

Rama saw the dreadful body of the demon. He knew now that Laksmana was right. And, he was even more puzzled by the way in which the demon

wailed aloud before dying. He was full of apprehension. He hastened towards the hermitage.

In the hermitage, both Sita and Laksmana heard the cry. Sita believed it was Rama's voice. She was panic-stricken. She said to Laksmana: "Go, go quickly: your brother is in danger. And, I cannot live without him. My breath and my heart are both violently disturbed." Laksmana remembered Rama's admonition that he should stay with sita and not leave her alone. He said to her: "Pray, be not worried." Sita grew suspicious and fur- ious. She said to him: "Ah, I see the plot now! You have a wicked eye on me and so have been waiting for this to happen. What a terrible enemy of Rama you are, pretending to be his brother!" Distressed to hear these words, Laksmana replied: "No one in the three worlds can overpower Rama, blessed lady! It was not his voice at all. These demons in the forest are capable of simulating the voice of anyone. Having killed that demon disguised as a deer, Rama will soon be here. Fear not." His calmness even more annoyed Sita, who literally flew into a rage. She said again: "Surely, you are the worst enemy that Rama could have had. I know now that you have been following us, cleverly pretending to be Rama's brother and friend. I know now that your real motive for doing so is either to get me or you are Bharata's accomplice. Ah, but you will not succeed. Presently, I shall give up my life. For I cannot live without Rama." Cut to the quick by these terrible words, Laksmana said: "You are worshipful to me: hence I cannot answer back. It is not surprising that women should behave in this manner: for they are easily led away from dharma; they are fickle and sharp- tongued. I cannot endure what you said just now. I shall go. The gods are witness to what took place here. May those gods protect you. But I doubt if when Rama and I return, we shall find you." Bowing to her, Laksmana left.

dvijati vesena hi tam drstva ravanan agatam

sarvair atithi satkaraih půjayamasa maithili (33)

Ravana was looking for this golden opportunity. He disguised himself as an ascetic, clad in ochre robes, carrying a shell water-pot, a staff and an umbrella, and approached Sita who was still standing outside the cottage eagerly looking for Rama's return. His very presence in that forest was inauspic- ious: and even the trees and the waters of the rivers were

frightened of him, as it were. In a holy disguise, Ravapa stood before Sita: a deep well covered with grass; a death-trap.

Gazing at the noble Sita, who had now withdrawn into the cottage and whose eyes were raining tears, Ravaga came near her. and though his heart was filled with lust, he was chanting Vedic hymns. He said to Sita in a soft, tender and affectionate tone: "O young lady! Pray, tell me, are you the goddess of fortune or the goddess of modesty, or the consort of Cupid himself?" Then Ravana described her incomparable beauty in utterly immodest terms, unworthy of an anchorite whose form he had assumed. He continued: "O charming lady! You have robbed me of my heart. I have not seen such a beautiful lady, neither a di- vine or a semi-divine being. Your extraordinary form and your youthfulness, and your living in this forest, all these together agitate my mind. It is not right that you should live in this forest. You should stay in palaces. In the forest monkeys, lions, tigers and other wild animals live. The forest is the natural habitat of demons who roam freely, You are living alone in this dreadful forest: are you not afraid, O fair lady? Pray, tell me, why are you living in this forest?"

Ravana was in the disguise of a brahmana. Therefore, Sita offered him the worship and the hospitality that it was her duty to offer a brahmana. She made him sit down; she gave him water to wash his feet and his hands. Then she placed food in front of him.

Whatever she did only aggravated his lust and his desire to abduct her and take her away to Lanka.

avasyam vinasisyanti sarve ravana raksasah

yesam tvam karkaso raja durbuddhir ajitendriyah (48.22)

Sita, then, proceeded to answer his enquiry concerning herself. He appeared to be a brahmana; and if his enquiry was not answered, he might get angry and curse her. Sita said: "I am a daughter of the noble king Janaka; Sita is my name. I am the beloved consort of Rama. After our marriage, Rama and I lived in the palace of Ayodhya for twelve years. "She then truthfully narrated all that took place just prior to Rama's exile to the forest. She continued: "And so, when Rama was twenty-five and I was eighteen, we left the palace and sought the forest-life. And so the three of us dwell in this forest. My husband, Rama, will soon return to the hermitage gathering

various animals and also wild fruits. Pray, tell me who you are, O brahmana, and what you are doing in this forest roaming all alone."

Ravana lost no time in revealing his true identity. He said: "I am not a brahmana, O Sita: I am the lord of demons, Ravana. My very name strikes terror in the hearts of gods and men. The moment I saw you, I lost my heart to you; and I derive no pleasure from the company of my wives. Come with me, and be my queen, O Sita. You will love Lanka. Laṅṅka is my capital, it is surrounded by the ocean and it is situated on the top of a hill. There we shall live together, and you will enjoy your life, and never even once think of this wretched forest-life."

Sita was furious to hear this. She said: "O demon-king! I have firmly resolved to follow Rama who is equal to the god of gods, who is mighty and charming, and who is devoted to righteousness. If you entertain a desire for me, his wife, it is like tying yourself with a big stone and trying to swim across the ocean: you are doomed. Where are you and where is he: there is no comparison. You are like a jackal; he the lion. You are like base metal; he gold."

But Ravana would not give up his desire. He repeated: "Even the gods dare not stand before me, O Sita! For fear of me even Kubera the god of wealth abandoned his space vehicle and ran away to Kailasa. If the gods, headed by Indra, even sense I am angry, they flee. Even the forces of nature obey me. Lanka is enclosed by a strong wall; the houses are built of gold with gates of precious stones. Forget this Rama, who lives like an ascetic, and come with me. He is not as strong as my little finger!" Sita was terribly angered: "Surely you seek the destruction of all the demons, by behaving like this, O Ravana. It cannot be otherwise since they have such an unWorthy king with no self-control. You may live after abducting Indra's wife, but not after abducting me, Rama's wife."

yat kṛtvi na bhaved dharmo na kirtir na yaso bhuvi

Sarirasya bhavet khedah kastat karma samacaret (50.19)

Ravana made his body enormously big and said to Sita: "You do not realise what a mighty person I am. I can step out into space, and lift up the earth with my arms; I can drink up the waters of the oceans; and I can kill death itself. I can shoot a missile and bring the sun down. Look at the size of my

body." As he expanded his form, Sita turned her face away from him. He resumed his original form with ten heads and twenty arms. Again he spoke to Sita: "Would you not like to be renowned in the three worlds? Then marry me. And, I promise I shall do nothing to displease you. Give up all thoughts of that mortal and unsuccessful Rama."

Ravana did not wait for an answer. Seizing Sita by her hair and lifting her up with his arm, he left the hermitage. Instantly the golden space vehicle appeared in front of him. He ascended it, along with Sita. Sità cried aloud: "O Rama." As she was being carried away, she wailed aloud: "O Laksmana, who is ever devoted to the elder brother, do you not know that I am being carried away by Ravana?" To Ravana, she said: "O vile demon, surely you will reap the fruits of your evil action: but they do not manifest immediately." She said as if to her- self: "Surely, Kaikey would be happy today." She said to the trees, to the river Godavari, to the deities dwelling in the forest, to the animals and birds: "Pray, tell Rama that I have been carried away by the wicked Ravana. She saw Jatayu and cried aloud: "O Jatayu! See, Ravana'is carrying me away."

Hearing that cry, Jatayu woke up. Jatayu introduced him- self to Ravana: "O Ravana, I am the king of vultures, Jatayu. Pray, desist from this action unworthy of a king. Rama, too, is a king; and his consort is worthy of our protection. A wise man should not indulge in such action as would disgrace him in the eyes of others. And, another's wife is as worthy of protection as one's own. The cultured and the common people often copy the behaviour of the king. If the king himself is guilty of unworthy behaviour what becomes of the people? If you persist in your wickedness, even the prosperity you enjoy will leave you soon.

"Therefore, let Sita go. One should not get hold of a greater load than one can carry; one should not eat what he cannot digest. Who will indulge in an action which is painful and which does not promote righteousness, fame or permanent glory? I am sixty thousand years old and you are young. I warn you. If you do not give up Sita, you will not be able to carry her away while I am alive and able to restrain you! I shall dash you down along with that space vehicle."

kancanoracchadan divyan pisaca vadanan kharan

tams casya javasampannan jaghana samare bali (15)

Ravana could not brook this insult: he turned towards Jatayu in great anger. Jatayu hit the spacecraft and Ravana; Ravana hit Jatayu back with terrible ferocity. This aerial com- bat between Ravana and Jatayu looked like the collision of two mountains endowed with wings. Ravana used all the conventional missiles, the Nalikas, the Naracas and the Vikarnis. The powerful eagle shrugged them off. Jatayu tore open the canopy of the spacecraft and inflicted wounds on Ravana himself.

In great anger, Jatayu grabbed Ravana's weapon (a cannon) and broke it with his claws. Ravana took up a more formidable weapon which literally sent a shower of missiles. Against these Jatayu used his own wings as an effective shield. Pouncing up- on this weapon, too, Jatayu destroyed it with his claws. Jatayu also tore open Ravana's armour. Nay, Jatayu even damaged the gold-plated propellers of Ravana's spacecraft, which had the appearance of demons, and thus crippled the craft which would take its occupant wherever he desired and which emitted fire. With his powerful beak, Jatayu broke the neck of Ravana's pilot.

With the spacecraft thus rendered temporarily useless, Ravana jumped out of it, still holding Sita with his powerful arm. While Ravana was still above the ground, Jatayu again challenged him: "O wicked one, even now you are unwilling to turn away from evil. Surely, you have resolved to bring about the destruction of the entire race of demons. Unknowingly or wantonly, you are swallowing poison which would certainly kill you and your relations. Rama and Laksmana will not tolerate this sinful act of yours: and you cannot stand before them on the battlefield. The manner in which you are doing this un- worthy act is despicable: you are behaving like a thief not like a hero." Jatayu swooped on Ravana and violently tore at his body.

Then there ensued a hand-to-hand fight between the two. Ravana hit Jatayu with his fist; but Jatayu tore Ravana's arms away. However, new ones sprang up instantly. Ravana hit Jatayu and kicked him. After some time, Ravana drew his sword and cut off the wings of Jatayu. When the wings were thus cut, Jatayu fell, dying. Looking at the fallen Jatayu, Sita ran towards him in great anguish, as she would to the side of a fallen relation. In inconsolable grief, Sita began to wail aloud.

mṛtyu kale yatha martyo viparitani sevate

mumursunam hi sarvesam yat pathyam tanna rocate (53.17)

As Sita was thus wailing near the body of Jatayu, Ravana came towards her. Looking at him with utter contempt, sita said: "I see dreadful omens, O Ravana. Dreams as also the sight and the cries of birds and beasts are clear indicators of the shape of things to come. But you do not notice them! Alas, here is Jatayu, my father-in-law's friend who is dying on my account. O Rama, O Laksmana, save me, protect me!"

Once again Ravana grabbed her and got into the spacecraft which had been made airworthy again. The Creator, the gods and the celestials who witnessed this, exclaimed: "Bravo, our pur- pose is surely accomplished." Even the sages of the Dandaka forest inwardly felt happy at the thought, "Now that STt& has been touched by this wicked demon, the end of Ravana and all the demons is near." As she was carried away by Ravana, Sita was wailing aloud: "O Rama, O Laksmana."

Placed on the lap of Ravana, Sita was utterly miserable. Her countenance was full of sorrow and anguish. The petals of the flowers that dropped from her head fell and covered the body of Ravana for a while. She was of beautiful golden complexion; and he was of dark colour. Her being seated on his lap looked like an elephant wearing a golden sash, or the moon shining in the midst of a dark cloud, or a streak of lightning seen in a dense dark cloud.

The spacecraft streaked through the sky as fast as a meteor would. On the earth below, trees shook as if to reassure Sita: "Do not be afraid", the waterfalls looked as if mountains were shedding tears, and people said to one another, "Surely, dharma has come to an end, as Ravana is carrying Sita away."

Once again Sita rebuked Ravana: "You ought to feel ashamed of yourself, O Ravana. You boast of your prowess; but you are stealing me away! You have not won me in a duel, which would be considered heroic. Alas, for a long, long time to come, people will recount your ignominy, and this unworthy and un- righteous act of yours will be remembered by the people. You are taking me and flying at such speed: hence no one can do anything to stop you. If only you had the courage to stop for a few moments, you would find yourself dead. My lord Rama and his brother Laksmana will not spare you. Leave me alone, O demon! But, you are in no mood to listen to what is good for your own welfare. Even as, one who has reached death's

door loves only harmful objects. Rama will soon find out where I am and ere long you will be transported to the world of the dead."

Ravana flew along, though now and then he trembled in fear.

yad idam rajatantram me tvayi sarvam pratisthitam

Jivitam ca visalaksi tvam ne pranair garlyasi (55.16)

The spacecraft was flying over hills and forests and was approaching the ocean. At that time, Sita beheld on the ground below, five strong vanaras seated and watching the craft with curiosity. Quickly. Sita took off the stole she had around her shoulders and, removing all her jewels and putting them in that stole, bundled them all up and threw the bundle into the midst of the vanaras, in the hope that should Rama chance to come there they would give him a clue to her whereabouts.

Ravana did not notice this but flew on. And now the craft, which shot through space at great speed, was over the ocean; a little while after that, Ravana entered Lanka along with his captive Sita. Entering his own apartments, Ravana placed Sita in them, entrusting her care to some of his chief female attendants. He said to them: "Take great care of sita. Let no male approach these apartments without my express permission. And, take great care to let Sita have whatever she wants and asks for. Any neglect on your part means instant death."

Ravana was returning to his own apartments: on the way he was still considering what more could be done to ensure the fulfilment of his ambition. He sent for eight of the most ferocious demons and instructed them thus: "Proceed at once to Janasthana. It was ruled by my brother Khara; but it has now been devastated by Rama. I am filled with rage to think that a mere human being could thus kill Khara, Düşana and all their forces. Never mind: I shall put an end to Rama soon. Keep an eye on him and keep me informed of his movements. You are free to bring about the destruction of Rama." And, the demons immediately left.

Ravana returned to where Sita was and compelled her to inspect the apartments. The palace stood on pillars of ivory, gold, crystal and silver and was studded with diamonds. The floor, the walls, the stairways everything was made of gold and diamonds. Then again he said to Sita: "Here at this place there are over a thousand demons ever ready to do my bidding. Their

services and the entire Lanka I place at your feet. My Life I offer to you; you are to me more valuable than my life. You will have under your command even the many good women whom I have married. Be my wife. Lanka is surrounded by the ocean, eight hundred miles on all sides. It is unapproachable to any- body; least of all to Rama. Forget the weakling Rama. Do not worry about the scriptural definitions of righteousness: we shall also get married in accordance with demoniacal wedding procedure. Youth is fleeting. Let us get married soon and en- joy life."

gatayustvam gatasriko gatasattvo gatendriyah

lanka vaidhavya samyuktta tvatkṛtena bhavisyati (12)

Placing a blade of grass between Ravana and herself, Sita said: O demon! Rama, the son of king Dasaratha, is my lord, the only one 1 adore. He and his brother Laksmana will surely put an end to your life. If they had seen you lay your hands on me, they would have killed you on the spot, even as they laid Khara to eternal rest. It may be that you cannot be killed by demons and gods; but you cannot escape being killed at the hands of Rama and Laksmana. Ravana, you are doomed, beyond doubt. You have already lost your life, your and on account good fortune, your very soul and your senses, of your evil deeds Lanka has attained widowhood. Though you do not perceive this, death is knocking at your door, O Ravana. O sinner, you cannot under any circumstances lay your hands on me. You may bind this body, or you may destroy it: it is after all insentient matter, and I do not consider it worth preserving, nor even life worth living--not in order to live a life which will earn disrepute for me."

Ravana found himself helpless. Hence, he resorted to threat. He said: "I warn you, Sita. I give you twelve months in which to make up your mind to accept me as your husband. If within that time you do not so decide, my cooks will cut you up easily for my breakfast." He had nothing more to say to her. He turned to the female attendants surrounding her and ordered them: "Take this Sita away to the Asoka grove. Keep her there. Use every method of persuasion that you know of to make her yield to my desire. Guard her vigilantly. Take her and break her will as you would tame a wild elephant."

The demonesses thereupon took Sita away and confined her to the Asoka grove, over which they themselves mounted guard day and night. Sita did

not find any peace of mind there, and stricken with fear and grief, she constantly thought of Rama and Laksmana.

It is said that at the same time, the creator Brahma felt perturbed at the plight of Sita. He spoke to Indra, the chief of gods: "Sita is in the Asoka grove. Pining for her husband, she may kill herself. Hence, go reassure her, and give her the celestial food to sustain herself till Rama arrives in Lanka." Indra, thereupon, appeared before Sita. In order to assure her of his identity he showed that his feet did not touch the ground and his eyes did not wink. He gave her the celestial food, saying: "Eat this, and you will never feel hunger or thirst, nor will fatigue overpower you." While Indra was thus talking to Sita, the goddess of sleep (Nidra) had overpowered the demonesses.

tani drstva nimittani mahaghorani raghavah

nyavartata tha tvarito javena 'Sramam Stmanah (57.13)

Marica, the demon who had disguised himself as a unique deer, had been slain. But Rama was intrigued and puzzled by the way in which Marica died, after crying: "O Sfta,O Laksmana." Rama sensed a deep and vicious plot. Hence he made haste to return to his hermitage. At the same time, he saw many evil omens. This aggravated his anxiety. He thought: "If Laksmana heard that voice, he might rush to my aid, leaving Sita alone. The demons surely wish to harm Sita; and this might well have been a plot to achieve that purpose."

As he was thus brooding and proceeding towards his hermit- age, he saw Laksmana coming towards him. The distressed Rama met the distressed Laksmana; the sorrowing Rama saw the sorrow- ful Laksmana. Rama caught hold of Laksmana's arm and asked him, in an urgent tone: "O Laksmana, why have you left Sita alone and come? My mind is full of anxiety and terrible apprehension. When I see all these evil omens around us, I fear that some- thing terrible has happened to Sita. Surely Sita has been stolen, killed or abducted."

Laksmana's silence and grief-stricken countenance added fuel to the fire of anxiety in Rama's heart. He asked again: "Is all well with Sita? Where is my Sita, the life of my life, without whom I cannot live even for an hour? Oh, what has happened to her? Alas, Kaikeyi's desire has been fulfilled today. If

I am deprived of Sita, I shall surely die. What more could Kaikeyi wish for? If, when I enter my hermitage, I do not find Sita alive, how shall I live? Tell me, Laksmana; speak. Surely, when that demon cried: O Laksmana' in my voice, you were afraid that something had happened to me. Surely, sita also heard that cry and in a state of terrible mental agony, sent you to me. It is a painful thing that thus Sita has been left alone; the demons who were waiting for an opportunity to hit back have been given that opportunity. The demons were sore distressed by my killing of the demon Khara. I am sure that they have done some great harm to Sita, in the absence of both of us. What can I do now? How can I face this terrible calamity?"

Still, Laksmana could not utter a word concerning what had happened. Both of them arrived near their hermitage. Every- thing that they saw reminded them of Sita.

na hi te paritusyami tyaktva yad asi maithili

kruddhayah paruşam vakyam Srutva yat tvam ihagatah (59.23)

And, once again before actually reaching the hermitage, and full of apprehension on account of Sita, Rama said to Laksmana: "Laksmana, you should not have come away like this, leaving Sita alone in the hermitage. I had entrusted her to your care." When Rama said this again and again, Laksmana re- plied: "I have not come to you, leaving Sita alone, just be- cause I heard the demon Marica cry:'O Laksmana, O Sita in your voice. I did so only upon being literally driven by Sita to do so. When she heard the cry, she immediately felt distressed and asked me to go to your help. I tried to calm her saying: 'It is not Rama's voice; it is unthinkable that Rama, who is capable of protecting even the gods, would utter the words,save me. She, however, misunderstood my attitude. She said some- thing very harsh, something very strange, something which I hate even to repeat. She said: 'Either you are an agent of Bharata or you have unworthy intentions towards me and there- fore you are happy that Rama is in distress and do not rush to his help'. It is only then that I had to leave."

In his anxiety for Sita, Rama was unimpressed by this argument. He said to Laksmana: "Swayed by an angry woman's words, you failed to carry out my words; I am not highly pleased with what you have done, Laksmana."

Rama rushed into their hermitage. But he could find no trace of Sita in it. Confused and distressed beyond measure, Rama said to himself, as he continued to search for sita : "Where is Sita? Alas, she could have been eaten by the demons. Or, taken away by someone. Or, she is hidden somewhere. Or, she has gone to the forest." The search was fruitless. His anguish broke its bounds. Not finding her, he was completely overcome by grief and he began to behave as if he were mad.

Unable to restrain himself, he asked the trees and the birds and the animals of the forest; "Where is my beloved sita?" The eyes of the deer, the trunk of the elephant, the boughs of trees, the flowers -- all these reminded Rama of sita. "Surely, you know where my beloved Sita is. Surely, you have a message from her. Won't you tell me? Won't you assuage the pain in my heart?" Thus Rama wailed. He thought he saw Sita at a distance and going up to 'her', he said: "My beloved, do not run away. Why are you hiding yourself behind those trees? Will you not speak to me?" Then he said to himself: "Surely it was not Sita. Ah, she has been eaten by the demons. Did I leave her alone in the hermitage only to be eaten by the demons?" Thus lamenting, Rama roamed awhile and ran around awhile.

svargo'pi sttayah hinah sünya eva mato mama

minihotsṛjya hi vane gacchayodhyam purim Subham (62.15)

Again Rama returned to the hermitage, and, seeing it empty, gave way to grief again. He asked Laksmana: "Where has my beloved Sita gone, O Laksmana? Or, has she actually been carried away by someone?" Again, imagining that it was all fun and a big joke which sita was playing, he said: "Enough of this fun, Sita; come out. See, even the deer are stricken with grief because they do not see you." Turning to Laksmana again, he said: "Lakşmaga, I cannot live without my Sita. I shall soon join my father in the other world. But, he may be annoyed with me and say: 'I told you to live in the forest for fourteen years; how have you come here before that period?' Ah Sita, do not forsake me."

Laksmana tried to console him: "Grieve not, O Rama. Surely, you know that Sita is fond of the forest and the caves on the mountainside. She must have gone to these caves. Let us look for her in the forest. That is the proper thing to do; not to grieve."

These brave words took Rama's grief away. Filled with zeal and eagerness, Rama along with Laksmana, began to comb the forest. Rama was distressed: "Laksmana, this is strange; I do not find Sita anywhere." But Laksmana continued to con- sole Rama: "Fear not, brother; you will surely recover the noble Sita soon."

But this time, these words were less meaningful to Rama. He was overcome by grief, and he lamented: "Where shall we find Sita, O Laksmana, and when? We have looked for her everywhere in the forest and on the hills, but we do not find her." Lamenting thus, stricken with grief, with his intelligence and his heart robbed by the loss of Sita, Rama frequent- ly sighed in anguish, muttering: "Ah my beloved".

Suddenly, he thought he saw her, hiding herself behind the banana trees, and now behind the karnikara trees. And, he said to 'her': "My beloved, I see you behind the banana trees! Ah, now I see you behind the karnikara tree: my dear, enough, enough of this play: for your fun aggravates my anguish. I know you are fond of such play; but pray, stop this and come to me now."

When Rama realised that it was only his hallucination, he turned to Laksmana once more and lamented: "I am certain now that some demon has killed my beloved Sita. How can I return to Ayodhya without Sita? How can I face Janaka, her father? Oh, no: Laksmana, even heaven is useless without Sita; I shall continue to stay in the forest; you can return to Ayodhya. And you can tell Bharata that he should continue to rule the country."

na madvidho duṣkṛta karmakarf manye dvitiyosti vasundharayam

Sokena Soko hi paramparaya mameti bhindan hṛdayam manas ca (63.3)

Rama was inconsolable and even infected the brave Laksmana. Shedding tears profusely, Rama continued to speak to Laksmana who had also fallen a prey to grief by this time: "NO one in this whole world is guilty of as many misdeeds as I am, O Laks- mana: and that is why I am being visited by sorrow upon sorrow, grief upon grief, breaking my heart and dementing me. I lost my kingdom, and I was torn away from my relations and friends. I got reconciled to this misfortune. But then I lost my father. I was separated from my mother. Coming to this hermitage, I was getting reconciled to that misfortune. But I could not remain at peace with myself for long. Now this terrible misfortune, the worst of all, has visited me.

"Alas, how bitterly Sita would have cried while she was carried away by some demon. May be she was injured; may be her lovely body was covered with blood. Why is it that when she was subjected to such suffering, my body did not split into pieces? I fear that the demon must have cut open Sita's neck and drunk her blood. How terribly she must have suffered when she was dragged by the demons.

"Laksmana, this river Godavari was her favourite resort. Do you remember how she used to come and sitting on this slab of stone talk to us and laugh? Probably she came to the river Godavari in order to gather lotuses? But, no:she would never go alone to these places.

"O sun! You know what people do and what people do not do. You know what is true and what is false. You are a witness to all these. Pray, tell me, where has my beloved Sita gone. For, I have been robbed of everything by this grief. O wind! You know everything in this world, for you are everywhere.Pray, tell me, in which direction did Sita go?"

Rama said: "See, Laksmana, if Sita is somewhere near the river Godavari." Laksmana came back and reported that he could not find her. Rama himself went to the river and asked the river: "O Godavari, pray tell me, where has my beloved Sita gone?" But the river did not reply. It was as if, afraid of the anger of Ravana, Godavari kept silent.

Rama was disappointed. He asked the deer and the other animals of the forest: "Where is Sita? Pray, tell me in which direction has Sita been taken away." He then observed the deer and the animals; all of them turned southwards and some of them even moved southwards. Rama then said to Laksmana: "O Laksmana, see, they are all indicating that Sita has been taken in a southerly direction."

na dharmas trayate sitam hriyamanam mahavane

bhaksitayam hi vaidehyam hatayam api laksmana

ke hi loke priyan kartum sakttah saumya mamesvarah (53)

Laksmana, too, saw the animals' behaviour as sure signs indicating that Sita had been borne away in a southerly direction, and suggested to Rama that they should also proceed in that direction. As they were thus proceeding, they saw petals of flowers fallen on the ground. Rama recognised them and said to Laksmana: "Look here, Laksmana, these are petals from the flowers

that I had given to sfta: Surely, in their eager- ness to please me, the sun, the wind and the earth, have con- trived to keep these flowers fresh."

They walked further on. Rama saw footprints on the ground. Two of them he immediately recognised as those of Sita. The other two were big -- obviously the footprints of a demon. Bits and pieces of gold were strewn on the ground. Lo and behold, Rama also saw blood which he concluded was Sita's blood: he wailed again: "Alas, at this spot, the demon killed Sita to eat her flesh." He also saw evidence of a fight: and he said: "Perhaps there were two demons fighting for the flesh of Sita."

Rama saw on the ground pieces of a broken weapon, an armour of gold, a broken canopy, and the propellers and other parts of a spacecraft. He also saw lying dead, one who had the ap- pearance of the pilot of the craft. From these he concluded that two demons had fought for the flesh of Sita, before one carried her away. He said to Laksmana: "The demons have earned my unquenchable hate and wrath. I shall destroy all of them. Nay, I shall destroy all the powers that be who refuse to return we adhere to Look at the irony of fate, Laksmana: sita to me. dharma, but dharma could not protect Sita who has been abducted in this forest! When these powers that govern the universe wit- ness Sita being eaten by the demons without doing anything to stop it, who is there to do what is pleasing to us? I think our meekness is misunderstood to be weakness. We are full of self- control, compassion and devoted to the welfare of all beings: and yet these virtues have become as good as vices in us now. I shall set aside all these virtues and the universe shall witness my supreme glory which will bring about the destruction of all creatures, including the demons. If Sita is not immediately brought back to me, I shall destroy the three worlds -- the gods, the demons and other creatures will perish, becoming targets of my most powerful missiles. When I take up my weapon in anger, O Laksmana, no one can confront me, even as no one can evade old age and death."

sprsantyanilavad rajan ksanena na bhavanti ca

asvasihi narasrestha praninah kasya napadah (66.5)

Seeing the world-destroying mood of Rama, Laksmana en- deavoured to console him. He said to Rama:

"Rama, pray, do not go against your nature. Charm in the moon, brilliance in the sun, motion in the air, and endurance in the earth these are their essential nature: in you all these are found and in addition, eternal glory. Your nature cannot desert you; even the sun, the moon and the earth cannot abandon their nature! Moreover, being king, you cannot punish all the created beings for the sin of one person. Gentle and peaceful monarchs match punishment to crime: and, over and above this, you are the refuge of all beings and their goal. I shall without fail find out the real criminal who has abducted Sita; I shall find out whose armour and weapons these are. And you shall mete out just punishment to the sinner. Oh, no, no god will seek to displease you, O Rama: Nor these trees, mountains and rivers. I am sure they will all eagerly aid us in our search for Sita. Of course, if Sita cannot be recovered through peaceful means, we shall consider other means.

"Whom does not misfortune visit in this world, O Rama? And, misfortune departs from man as quickly as it visits him. Hence, pray, regain your composure. If you who are endowed with divine intelligence betray lack of endurance in the face of this misfortune, what will others do in similar circumstances?

"King Nahusa, who was as powerful as Indra, was beset with misfortune. The sage Vasistha, our family preceptor, had a hundred sons and lost all of them on one day! Earth is tormented by volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes. The sun and the moon are afflicted by eclipses. Misfortune strikes the great ones and even the gods.

"For, in this world people perform actions whose results are not obvious; and these actions which may be good or evil, bear their own fruits. Of course, these fruits are evanescent. People who are endowed with enlightened intelligence know what is good and what is not good. People like you do not grieve over misfortunes and do not get deluded by them.

"Why am I telling you all this, O Rama? Who in this world is wiser than you? However, since, as is natural, grief seems to veil wisdom, I am saying all this. All this I learnt only from you: I am only repeating what you yourself taught me earlier. Therefore, O Rama, know your enemy and fight him."

sarvatra khalu dṛsyante sadhavo dharmacarinah

Surah Saranyah saumitre tiryagyonigateşvapi (68.25)

Rama then asked Laksmana: "O Laksmana, tell me, what should we do now?" Laksmana replied: "Surely, we should search this forest for Sita."

This advice appealed to Rama. Immediately he fixed the bayonet to his weapon and with a look of anger on his face, set out to search for Sita. Within a very short time and distance, both Rama and Laksmana chanced upon Jatayu, seriously and mortally wounded and heavily bleeding. Seeing that enormous vulture lying on the ground, Rama's first thought was: "Surely, this is the one that has swallowed Sita." He rushed forward with fixed bayonet.

Looking at Rama thus rushing towards him, and rightly inferring Rama's mood, Jatayu said in a feeble voice: "Sita has been taken away by Ravana. I tried to intervene. I battled with the mighty Ravana. I broke his armour, his canopy, the propellers and some parts of his spacecraft. I killed his pilot. I even inflicted injuries on his person. But he cut off my wings and thus grounded me." When Rama heard that the vulture had news of Sita, he threw his weapon away and kneeling down near the vulture embraced it.

Rama said to Laksmana: "An additional calamity to endure, O Laksmana. Is there really no end to my misfortune? My misfortune plagues even this noble creature, a friend of my fathers." Rama requested more information from Jatayu concern- ing Sita, and also concerning Ravana. Jatayu replied: "Taking Sita with him, the demon flew away in his craft, leaving a mysterious storm and cloud behind him. I was mortally wounded by him. Ah, my senses are growing dim. I feel life ebbing away, Rama. Yet, I assure you, you will recover Sita." Soon Jatayu lay lifeless. Nay, it was his body, for he himself ascended to heaven. Grief-stricken afresh, Rama said to Laksmana: "Jatayu lived a very long life; and yet has had to lay down his life today. Death, no one in this world can escape. And what a noble end! What a great service this noble vulture has rendered to me! Pious and noble souls are found even amongst subhuman creatures, O Laksmana. Today I have forgotten all my previous misfortunes: I am extremely tormented by the loss of this dear friend who has sacrificed his life for my sake. I shall myself cremate it, so that it may reach the highest realms."

Rama himself performed the funeral rites, reciting those Vedic mantras which one recites during the cremation of one's own close relations. After this, Rama and Laksmana proceeded on their journey in search of Sita.

mayalkena viniryukttah parimuñcasva raghava

mah hi bhutabalim dattva palayasva yathasukham (39)

Proceeding in a south-westerly direction, Rama and Laksmana reached a dense, deep and untrodden forest. This was the Kraunca forest. Then they proceeded in an easterly direction and got out of that forest. They went past the hermitage of the sage Matanga. The forest adjoining this hermitage was even more fearful than all the previous ones they had passed through. And there they saw a huge cave which had never seen the light of the sun or of the moon. Near this cave, they saw a demoness, most frightful to look at. She had a belly that protruded to a great length, her teeth were sharp, her skin was hard and she was eat- ing the wild animals of the forest. When she saw them approaching, she quickly pounced upon Laksmana and began to drag him away saying: "Come, let us enjoy. She said to Laksmana:" I am Ayomukhi. I love you; and surely you realise that I am worthy of you. With me you can roam this forest and enjoy life." Quickly he did to her what he had already done to Surpanakha.

The brothers proceeded further and into an even denser forest which was difficult to enter. Apprehending trouble, Laksmana said to Rama: "Keep your weapon in readiness, O Rama: I see many evil omens, though there is also a good omen which portends success to us." Even as he was saying this, there was great tumult ahead of them. Soon they saw a terrible looking and unusual demon.

That demon had a broad chest, it had an enormous body, but it had no head and no neck, and it had its mouth in its belly. He spoke like thunder. He had only one eye on his fore- head which was on his chest. He was endowed with long arms by which he drew his prey to himself! He blocked the path of Rama and Laksmana. And, when they came near him, he caught hold of them, even though they tried to retrace their steps. His name was Kabandha.

In Kabandha's vice-like grip, the two brothers could not do anything. Rama braved the ordeal. Laksmana, however, was distressed. He said to Rama: "I am finished, O Rama. Let my life be offered in sacrifice to this demon; and

pray, escape from his grip and go forth to find Sita. And, then, regaining your kingdom, may you rule for ever." And this time Rama consoled him and restored his self-confidence. Kabandha said to them: "I was extremely hungry. Surely, you have walked into my hands in order to appease my hunger." Rama was stricken with grief once again, and he said: "Surely, Time and Death do not spare any one. Before we recover from one tragedy, we are overtaken by another."

tatas tau desakalajñau khadgabhyam eva raghavau

acchindatam susamhṛṣṭau bahu tasyamsadeŝatah (70.8)

Kabandha asked them: "Pray, tell me who you are--you have come to me at the right time to appease my hunger." Laksmana thereupon said to Rama: "Rama, obviously this demon's strength is in his arms. Let us quickly cut them off. He is unarmed; and hence it is not proper for us to kill him."

Kabandha was annoyed by this conversation between Rama and Laksmana. And, so, without wasting any more time, he got ready to devour them. As he drew them nearer to his mouth in order to do so, Rama and Laksmana, who knew what to do where and when, quickly cut off the demon's arms with their swords. The demon fell down on the ground giving a mighty roar. Once again, he Looked at the princes and questioned: "Who are you?" Laksmana told him who they were and what brought them to the forest; in turn he asked the demon: "Who are you?"

Kabandha narrated his biography, in the following words: "In my previous life I possessed a gigantic and radiant form which rivalled the sun and the moon. I was very powerful. Power- drunk, I used to harass the sages and even the gods.

"And, I propitiated the creator Brahma and obtained from him the boon of a very long life. Intoxicated further with this boon, I even picked a quarrel with Indra, the king of the gods. Using his mighty weapon, the thunderbolt, Indra struck me, de- prived me of my legs, head and mouth which had all been pushed into my torso. When I pleaded that he could have killed me instead, he said he did not want to go against the boon of the Creator. When I prayed, 'With this form how can I find my food?', Indra bestowed exceptionally long arms upon me.

"With this form, I once attacked the sage Sthulašira; and he cursed me: 'Continue to remain in this form!' I begged of him to modify his curse so that this dreadful state might come to an end. He blessed me: 'When Rama and Laksmana come here and cut off your hands, you will be released from this form.' By the very fact that you have cut off my arms, I know that you are Rama. Please perform my cremation: and then I shall be able to help you in any manner you wish me to."

Rama at once thought of sita! He asked Kabandha: "Pray. tell me where Sita is. I hear she has been abducted by Ravana. I do not know who he is, what he looks like and where he is. Pray, tell me all this." But the demon repeated: "I have no power to divine the answers to your questions. Before being cremated by you, I have no knowledge of the answers to your questions concerning Sita."

rama sad yukttayo loke yabhih sarvam vimrsyate

parimrsto dasantena dasabhagena sevyate (72.8)

Helped by Laksmana Rama personally cremated the demon Kabandha. As the funeral pyre was lit, the uncouth body of Kabandha seemed to melt away in the fire. From that fire there emerged a radiant being clad in spotless attire and adorned by precious jewels. Stationed in space in his ethereal body, this divine being, said to Rama:

"O Rama, I shall now reveal to you the way in which you will surely find Sita. In this world, when one is faced with a calamity, there are the six ways of overcoming it: and one of them is to cultivate the friendship of one in similar predicament. Without such a friend you will not succeed in your mission of recovering Sita. I shall tell you where and how to find such a friend. There is a vanara known as Sugriva whose brother Vali has driven him out of the kingdom. Sugriva will help you in your task. At the same time, Surely he can be helped in his ambition to regain his lost kingdom. Thus you can be of mutual help. However, even if you are unable to help him in his work, he will certainly help you in yours. Sugriva dwells on the Rsyamuka hill. He is very clever, and knows everything in this world. He is also highly cultured and true to his word. He has a large band of vanaras under him, with whose help Sita can easily be discovered. If necessary, he will send the vanara hosts to invade Lanka and, after destroying the demons, bring Sita back to you." The transformed Kabandha then described the route

to the Ṛsyamuka hill in great detail. He said: "Proceed- ing in a westerly direction, from hill to hill, from forest to forest, you will come to the Pampa lake whose waters are clear and free from weed. You will find beautiful swans and fish in the lake. You will feed them, and you will drink the waters of the lake. Later you will meet the vanaras, who also come to the lake. Rama, in days of yore, the sage Matanga lived in that region. His disciples used to serve him by bringing foodstuff from the forest. Drops of sweat that fell from their bodies watered the plants in the forest whose blossoms, therefore, do not fade nor die. The sage is no more; and even his disciples have cast off their physical bodies, But, one aged lady-disciple of the sage is still alive. She is Sabart who is eagerly await- ing your visit, after which she will ascend to heaven. That forest is known as Matangavana. To the east of this Matangavana is the Rsyamuka hill. It is steep and is difficult to ascend. However, it has its own special reward for the hero who ascends it: his dreams come true. Rama, when you reach this hill, you will surely give up your grief. Sugriva dwells in a cave on the side of this mountain."

dṛsṭo 'yam asramah saumya bahva scaryah kṛtamanam (75.3)

pranasṭam asubham tat tat kalyanam samupasthitam (75.5)

Rama and Laksmana followed the directions of Kabandha. They reached the western shore of the Pampa lake. There they saw the beautiful hermitage of the ascetic Sabari.

When Sabari saw them, she welcomed them with great respect and devotion. She bowed to their feet. She worshipped Rama. Rama enquired after her welfare and the fruition of her spiritual practices.

Filled with the highest devotion, Sabari replied to Rama: "I have now reached the perfection of my austerities, for I have beheld you. Today my birth has borne its fruit; the worship I have offered my preceptors has been endowed with meaning. I shall attain to heaven, too, O Rama, now that I have seen you. My eyes have beheld you; my heart has been purified; and I shall ascend to the worlds of eternal life, by your grace."

She continued: "When you had just arrived at the Citrakoota hill, the other disciples of the sage Matanga ascended to heaven. They said to me: 'Soon Rama and Laksmana will come here; stay here till then and worship them. You can then join us. I lay before you, O Rama, the best fruits of this forest.

Pray accept them and bless me." After accepting her hospitality, Rama requested her to show him the objects associated with the sage Matanga and his disciples. Sabari thereupon showed them round the forest named after Matanga, the place where they practised their austerities and shed their bodies, the altar at which they worshipped, the confluence of the seven oceans, the dress of the bark of trees left behind by them (and which had not faded), and the flowers which remained fresh. After thus showing them round, Sabari offered her body into the sacred fire and, discarding her physical body, assumed a resplendent astral body and ascended to heaven.

Rama then said to Laksmana: "Laksmana, we have seen the holy hermitage of these holy sages, full of wonder; we have seen the blessed animals that roam this place freely; we have seen the seven seas; and we have offered libations for our ancestors, too. I feel that all our past evil actions have been atoned and that our misfortune has come to an end."

Leaving that hermitage of Sabari they went towards the Rsyamuka hill, after passing near the Matangasara lake which is a subsidiary lake to Pampa, and which was full of alligators and turtles, and which, with its many coloured lotuses and lilies looked like a beautiful carpet. Having reached the hill, Rama said to Laksmana: "Please go and look for Sugriva."

END OF ARANYA KANDAM

KISKINDHA KANDAM

1st JUNE

Rama's stay in Kiskindha

pasya laksmana samragam tiryagyonigatesvapi (42)

mama 'pyevam visalaksi janaki jatasambhrama

madanenabhivarteta yadi napahṛta bhavet (43)

Spring was upon the earth. Life sprang up from the earth. It was the time for new manifestation, new growth, new birth. Love was in the air. Love stirred in the hearts of all beings.

Spring entered Rama through the avenues of his senses. Everything that he saw, everything that he heard, everything he smelt and everything that he touched, reminded him of his beloved Sita. Memory of Sita renewed his grief. And, thus, he lamented the loss of Sita:

"Look at this beautiful Pampa lake, O Laksmana: how it sparkles like a huge gem. And look at these trees laden with flowers. Soothing to the eyes, they agitate my mind and renew my grief. I think of the ascetic life that Bharata is leading there in Ayodhya, because of me, and I think of Sita. The whole ground is carpeted with lovely flowers of many hues. The trees are laden with flowers of their own and of the creepers that entwine them.

"See here, Laksmana, these Karpikara trees do not look like trees any more. With the colourful blossoms on them, they make me feel that they are noble men clad in yellow robes and decked with ornaments. With all this, however, my heart is heavy. This spring which has brought joy and song to birds and beasts, only intensifies my sorrow, as I have been separated from my beloved Sita. And, Cupid who brings love and pleasure to beings only aggravates my grief. When these birds and beasts used to chirp or cry, Sita used to be delighted and she would seek my company to share the delight. See, O Laksmana, how the female birds and even the bees, when they are united with their mates utter delightful sounds expressing their joy. All these entering through the avenues of my senses, awaken love in me.

"I am afraid, O Laksmana, that this extremely pleasant season, spring, might consume me with grief, for I have been deprived of the company of Sita. Sita who is out of my sight, and spring which is here -- both together burn me. Strange it is that even the pleasant breeze is scorching me with sorrow. The male peacock dancing with the peahen seems to be mocking at me! See, Laksmana, how this peahen approaches her mate so fondly: Love is common to all beings; sub-human beings, too My beloved Sita too would come to me like that, had she not been abducted by the demon."

mayi bhavo hi vaidehyas tattvato vinivesitah

mama 'pi bhavah sitayam sarvatha vinivesitah (52)

"Surely, it is spring now where my Sita lives. When even I am tormented by the coming of spring and the absence of Sita, how will she be able to enjoy spring or to avoid being tormented by spring? I am beginning to feel more and more convinced, O Laksmana, that scorched by the fire of separation from me, Sita cannot live. Sita and I are eternally united with each other--she in me and I in her.

"But no. Look at that crow. It used to cry foreboding the abduction of Sita. Now it seems to me that it is conveying the joyous message that I will soon be re-united with my beloved.

"On the other hand, when I see that Asoka tree shaking in the wind and shedding its flowers, it looks as if it is shaking its fists at me and threatening me. Look at this placid and beautiful Pampa lake, literally covered with lilies and lotuses which are also beautifully reflected on the water. But it does not cause me any joy; for I do not have Sita with me.

"What a strange power that love possesses! It powerfully revives the memory of the beloved who has gone away and who is inaccessible. I can surely cope with the sorrow in me caused by separation from Sita: but this spring season makes this sorrow impossible to bear. Whatever was enjoyable with Sita becomes insufferable without her!

"Everything here and now reminds me of Sita. The lotus reminds me of Sita's lotus-like eyes. The soothing and cool breeze reminds me of Sita's breath.

"Surely, the Rsyamuka hill is rich in minerals; even the dust that rises from it seems to be many coloured, suggesting mineral dust. All the trees are in full bloom. And, the creepers entwining the trees suggest lovers in embrace. Look at the wind; it is having a very good time. It blows from tree to tree, from forest to forest, enjoying the aroma and the sweet- ness of the different blossoms.

"It looks as if the trees vie with one another, in a spirit of healthy competition, in clothing themselves with richer and richer garments of lovely flowers. And as the wind blows over them, it seems to me that each tree is boasting about its own supremacy over the others -- nodding its head in self-assertion.

"This place is so beautiful, O Laksmana, that if only Sita were with me here, I would not even think of the pleasures of the lord of heaven."

smrtva viyogajam duhkham tyaja sneham priye jane

ati sneha parişvangad vartir ardra 'pi dahyate (117)

"Look at those two deer, O Laksmana: the male and the female deer, how they sport happily on that mountain. Alas, I have lost my beloved Sita. I can be happy only when I am re- united with Sita. Life is unbearable without Sita; but I know that when I regain Sita I shall regain zest for life and joy, too. I am worried about Sita: she must be suffering terribly on account of her separation from me.

"I am also worried about what I can do when I return to Ayodhya upon completion of the fourteen years: how shall I face king Janaka and what shall I tell him when he enquires of Sita? And, what shall I tell my mother Kausalya when she lovingly enquires about her beloved daughter-in-law?

"How dreadful it is, O Laksmana, that she who insisted upon following me in my adversity has been taken away from me! How terrible it is that she who wanted to be with me, to serve me even during my exile, has thus been abducted and I was not able to prevent it! Where is Sita, O Laksmana? When will I hear her sweet speech?

"O Laksmana, go to Ayodhya and rejoin the noble Bharata. Forget me. I cannot live without Sita."

The noble and wise Laksmana said to Rama: "Abandon this sorrow caused by your separation from Sita, O Rama! Even a dry wick gets ignited when it is smeared with a lot of gum. Even so, a cool mind is agitated by too much of sneha (affection or gum). Surely, wherever he may be, Ravana cannot live, if he does not give up Sita immediately. Even if he goes to the nether world, even if he hides himself in the womb of Diti (the mother of the demons), I shall kill him and rescue Sita.

"Maintain the auspicious state of mind which is your own nature: a lost object is not retrieved except by effort! Hence, we should cultivate enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the greatest power. For a man endowed with enthusiasm nothing in this world is impossible of achievement. A man endowed with enthusiasm does not despair in action. We shall regain Sita

by recourse to enthusiastic action, O Rama. Give up this sorrow born of affection which has unfortunately veiled your own supreme glory."

Thus encouraged by Laksmana, Rama regained his composure and both of them began to ascend the Rsyamuka hill. One day Sugriva saw two mighty men coming up that hill, and greatly frightened, took refuge in the hermitage of the sage Matanga.

nanṛgveda vinttasya nayajurveda dharinah

nasamaveda viduṣah sakyam evam prabhasitum (3.28)

When Sugriva saw the two mighty heroes, Rama and Laksmana, he apprehended danger: he was afraid that they had been sent by his elder brother to kill him. He said as much to his ministers. Surrounded by his ministers, Sugriva kept constantly moving from one hill to another, in an attempt to avoid a confrontation with the visitors.

Seeing Sugriva thus agitated, one of his ministers, Hanuman said to him: "Pray, give up this irrational fear. We are still on the Malaya (Rsyamuka) hill which is inaccessible to Vali. And I do not see Vali anywhere here. A king like you should not allow his mind to be perturbed. We should watch the actions and gestures of others and know what goes on in their mind! That in- deed is wise statesmanship, O King!"

Hanuman's speech appealed to the heart of Sugriva. He then said to Hanuman: "It is natural, O Hanuman, for one who sees such mighty warriors as these, to be apprehensive. Kings, like Vali, when they wish to destroy their enemies, resort to many deceptive means: hence kings should not be trusted. We cannot place any reliance on their appearance, either, O Hanuman; for enemies destroy others, often assuming a disguise. Vali is shrewd; and we should also resort to a shrewd plan to foil his attempt to destroy me. O Hanuman, please suitably disguise yourself and go to them; and for my sake find out who they are, with the help of their gestures and words, while you praise me."

Hanuman disguised himself as a mendicant and humbly approached the two princes. After bowing to them, he asked them: "You look like royal sages or gods, but you are clad like ascetics. Pray, tell me who you are and what you are doing here. You have powerful arms like princes; yet, they are not adorned with ornaments! Yet, your weapons are excellent and richly

covered with gold and precious stones. I shall tell you who I am. A great leader of the jungle folk (vanaras) named Sugriva lives here, having been driven out of his kingdom by his cruel brother Vali. I am Hanuman, his minister. Sugriva seeks your friendship. I, too, am a vanara though disguised as a mendicant."

Rama greatly admired the speech of Hanuman, and said to Laksmana: "Surely, Laksmana, no one who is not a master of the three Vedas can speak like him. There is not a single fault in his Tanguage, mode of expression, choice of words or gestures. I am greatly impressed by it. Pray, give him a suitable reply." Laksmana then said to Hanuman: "We have indeed heard of the nobię Sugriva already, O vanara! We would also love to meet Sugriva and cultivate his friendship for mutual benefit."

sarva lokasya dharmatma saranyah saranam pura

gurur me raghavah so 'yam sugrivam saranam gatah (4.20)

Hanuman was delighted to hear Laksmana's words. He asked Rama: "Pray, tell me why you are here in this forest and in what way we may help you."

Laksmana gave a full and detailed account up to the abduction of Stta. He added: "We do not know where the demon who has thus abducted Stta lives and what his powers are. And, not long ago we met the demon Danu (another name for Kabandha) who, while he was ascending to the higher worlds, vouched to us the knowledge, that Sugriva would help us find the demon who had taken Sita away. We have therefore come here at his bidding. This is an extraordinary event, O Hanuman! He who is the refuge of the whole world seeks the refuge of Sugriva. He whose grati- fication brings about the gratification of all, seeks the grace of Sugriva, the chief of the vanaras. Sugriva should help accomplish Rama's purpose, O Hanuman."

Hanuman was even more delighted by this speech. He said: "It is our good fortune that both of you who have mastered your mind and senses have come here. Sugriva, too, needs your help. Deprived of his wife and his kingdom by his brother Vali, Sugriva lives here in exile in great fear. And Sugriva will surely render all possible help to Rama."

Hanuman shed the disguise of a mendicant and escorted the princes to the presence of Sugriva. Hanuman acquainted Sugriva with the identity of

Rama and Laksmana, and announced: "O King, receive Rama and Laksmana with due honour and make friendship with them."

Welcoming Rama and Laksmana, Sugriva then said to them: "I have heard everything from Hanuman. If my friendship is accept- able to you, here is my hand!" Hearing this, Rama grasped the hand of Sugriva in his own hand; and he embraced Sugriva in genuine affection and friendship. Hanuman then kindled the sacred fire which bore witness to this new and significant alliance. Going round the fire, Sugriva said to Rama: "You are now my beloved friend; and from now on we shall share our joys and sorrows."

When they had all been seated, after this ceremony, Sugriva said to Rama: "My brother Vali has deprived me of my kingdom, and even my wife has been taken away by him, O Rama. I live here on this hill which is difficult of access to Vali. But I live in great and constant fear. Kindly ensure, O Rama, that this cause of my fear may be removed." Rama immediately said: "Look at these missiles of mine, O Sugriva! I shall soon kill that wicked Vali."

durlabho ht 'drso bandhur asmin kale višesatah (7.18)

anṛtam no 'kttapurvaṁ me na ca vakşye kadacana (7.22)

Sugriva said to Rama: "O Rama, Hanuman has told me all about the purpose for which you have come here. I do not know where Ravana lives nor what his powers are. But I shall soon find out. Let Ravana be on this earth or in the nether world : he will not escape! Please rest assured. Incidentally, I re- member something which happened not long ago. I believe it was Sita who was being carried away by a demon who was obviously Ravana. That lady saw us sitting on this hill and threw a bundie which fell near us. She was wailing aloud: O Rama, O Laksmana.' The bundle contained some jewels which we have preserved."

Rama was impatient to see the bundle of jewels! When Sugriva brought it, Rama, looking at it, began to wail aloud once again. He said to Laksmana: "See, O Laksmana, look at this garment of Sita's with the jewels she was wearing at the time Ravana abducted her, and which she has thrown down. It is lucky that she dropped them on soft ground; they are intact." Looking at them, Laksmana said: "I do not recognise the ornaments worn by Sita on her head or on her body; but I do recognise the ornaments that adorned her

feet for I noticed them every day as I bowed to her." Once again Rama asked Sugriva: "O Sugriva, where does this demon live, who has abducted Sita causing such unhappiness to me, and bringing destruction, through me, to the whole race of demons?"

Once again, Sugriva said: "I do not know where he lives, O Rama. But do not worry yourself. I promise that I shall do the needful to bring Sita to you; give up sorrow. Abandon weakness of mind, O Rama. See, I have also been deprived of my kingdom and my wife. Though I belong to a primitive jungle tribe, I do not grieve: it does not behove you, belonging to a civilised princely family, to grieve and to lose heart. I pray to you with folded palms: regain manliness and do not let sorrow enter your heart. For, there is no happiness for those who worry and grieve; and they are robbed of their energy, too. Hence you should not grieve. Even living becomes doubtful in the case of one who has yielded to sorrow. Give up sorrow and be brave, O Rama. Please do not think I am preaching! I am only mentioning this for your own good, as a friend that I am."

Thus encouraged by Sugriva, Rama immediately regained his composure. He said to Sugriva: "My friend, do what a true friend should do to relieve one of his grief! Such friendship as exists between us is indeed rare in this world nowadays, O Sugriva. I have never uttered a lie:nor shall I ever be guilty of falsehood. I shall accomplish your purpose.

rama šokabhibhutoham šokartanaṁ bhavan gatih

vayasya iti kṛtva hi tvayyaham paridevaye (26)

Sugriva was supremely happy to hear Rama's words. He said: "O Rama, with your friendship and with your help, one can gain heaven itself, not to speak of one's own kingdom. I shall also be able to render some help to you, though right now I am unable to bring this home to you, on account of the misfortune into which I have fallen. Your friendship is of immeasurable value to me. Your friendship will raise me in the estimation of my people. Good people relinquish all sense of private owner- ship when they cultivate the friendship of other good people: gold, silver and even precious jewels they hold in common, with- out feeling, 'This is mine, not yours'. Such indeed shall be our friendship. Again, for the sake of one's friends one abandons wealth, pleasure and even one's country."

Rama entirely agreed with Sugriva's declaration of the characteristics of friendship. Cutting down one of the trees standing nearby, Sugriva enabled all of them to have seats. After they had all sat down, Sugriva once again submitted to Rama: "O Rama, driven out of my kingdom and deprived of my wife, I am liv- ing in sorrow and fear. I pray to you to relieve me of my dis- tress." Rama replied: "Surely, O Sugriva, helpful service is the fruit of friendship, and harm comes out of enmity; I shall im- mediately kill that sinner who has robbed you of your wife. Don't you see these powerful missiles which I possess? They will soon rob Vali of his life!"

Delighted with this assurance, Sugriva applauded Rama, and submitted again: "O Rama, I am stricken with sorrow: and you are the sole refuge of those who are grief-stricken. And, regarding you as my dear friend, I take refuge in you, and worry you like this." As he said this, his eyes filled with tears. He wiped them and endeavoured to regain his composure. And he continued: "O Rama, Vali is a mighty vanara. He not only usurped my throne, but threw me out of the kingdom after insulting me. Then he seized my wife and also incarcerated my relations. He is always plotting to kill me. That was the reason why I was stricken with fear when I first saw you two coming here. These few vanaras are the only companions I have. But, now that you have become my friend, I am sure my sorrow has come to an For in joy and sorrow, friends are the only resort of friends."

Rama then asked Sugriva : "Kindly tell me the whole story. How did you happen to incur the displeasure of Vali and why did he usurp your kingdom and seize your wife?"

evamukttva tu mam tatra vastrenaikena vanarah

tada nirvasayamasa vali vigata sadhvasah (10.26)

Sugriva said: "Vali is my elder brother. He is exceptionally strong. Father was very fond of him. And I loved him, too. When father died, naturally Vali was installed on the throne of our territory known as Kiskindha.

"Vali had an enemy known as Mayavi, the son of Maya. One day Mayavi came to our territory and challenged Vali to a duel. The womenfolk of the court and even I endeavoured to hold Vali back from accepting this challenge: we wished to prevent bloodshed. But Vali would not hear us.

"When Vali came out to fight Mayavi, the latter suddenly got frightened and he began to run. Vali followed him; so did I. The demon Mayavi entered a terrible cavern underground. Vali followed him, after instructing me: 'Stay at the mouth of this cavern, Sugriva, while I pursue this demon and kill him.' I pleaded that he should take me with him also; but Vali refused.

"I waited for a year at the mouth of this cavern. I heard terrible noises inside. But, Vali did not return. Blood gushed out of that cavern. I could not hear Vali's roar. I surmised that he had been killed by the demon. Heart-broken I returned to the kingdom. The ministers who somehow came to know the truth, installed me on the throne.

"Some time later, Vali returned to the kingdom. I greeted him but he did not take any notice of me. He was filled with rage. I humbly said to him: 'I feel that we are all fortunate in that you have returned to us alive. Here is your throne: pray take it. With troubled mind, I spent a year at the entrance to the cavern. I saw blood; and thought that you had been killed. Out of fear and sorrow I closed the cavern with a big rock and returned. The ministers insisted on installing me on the throne, as they did not wish to endanger the security of the state by leaving it without a ruler. I did not desire it. Pray forgive me. You are the ever adored king and I am as I was before.'

"But, however much I pleaded with him, he refused to listen to me. He was furious. He accused me unjustly. He said: 'I had asked you to stay at the mouth of the cavern. I killed the demon Mayavi and, trying to come out of the cavern, I did not even know the way, because you had covered the cavern with a rock. I kicked the stone off and have come here. Only to see that you have become king!' In great anger he drove me out of the kingdom with just one piece of cloth. And I have sought asylum on this hill which for another reason is out of bounds for Vali."

Rama repeated his pledge: "Your sorrow will end soon, as soon as I behold the sinful Vali who has seized your wife."

yo hi mattam pramattam va suptam va rahitam bhrsam

hanyat sa bhrupaha loke tvad vidham madamohitam (36)

Sugriva said: "Surely Rama, when you are roused to anger you can destroy even the worlds with your missiles, as the sun could at the close of the epoch.

However, listen attentively while I describe the powers of Vali, and then please do the needful.

"There once was a demon named Dundubhi who had the appear- ance of a buffalo. He too was extremely powerful. One day he went to the ocean itself and standing on the shore challenged the ocean to a fight! The ocean said to him: 'Pray, do not worry me! I am not your equal in might. But I shall tell you who might be able to take up your challenge. It is the father- in-law of lord Siva himself. It is Himavan. Kindly go to him and have a trial of strength.'

"Dundubhi lost no time in approaching Himavan. He began to shatter the mountain-peaks and destroy the hills. Tormented in this fashion, Himavan said to Dundubhi: 'Kindly do not torment me like this, O Dundubhi. I am not well versed in battle, for I am an abode of ascetics. I shall, however, tell you who is your equal in strength and heroism, so that you could challenge him to a duel. It is Vali, the son of Indra, who dwells in the Kişkindha territory. If you wish to meet your match and fight, he is the one you should approach quickly.

"Dundubhi went to Kişkindha. He lost no time in making his presence felt. He shook the earth, ravaged the forest and roared aloud. Vali challenged Dundubhi to a fight. As Vali emerged from the palace he was surrounded by a number of ladies, and he also appeared to be intoxicated. Dundubhi declined to fight him, saying: 'Enjoy yourself tonight, Vali, and come back to me tomorrow. You are boasting in front of women, and you are intoxicated. It is unethical to fight and kill a person who is intoxicated or who has a broken Limb, who is unarmed or who is emaciated." It is equal to the killing of an unborn child. You are drunk and your mind is befuddled with passion. So, enjoy yourself today and take leave of your friends and relations and your kingdom! You will see them no more.'

"But Vali would not be put off! He grabbed the demon, lifted him up, whirled him around and dashed him on the ground. Vali hit Dundubhi with his fists and feet. The demon was dead. However, while Vali kicked the demon and hurled him to a distance of four miles, blood from the demon fell in the vicinity of the hermitage of the sage Matanga."

yatha hi tejahsu varah sada ravir yatha hi ŝailo himavan mahadrisu

yatha catuşpatsu ca kesari varas tatha naranam asi vikrame varah (93)

"When the sage Matanga found that the vicinity of his hermitage had been desecrated by the blood and that the trees in the neighbourhood had either been destroyed or defoliated, he was annoyed.. He knew that it was the work of the jungle folk (vanaras). He came out of his hermitage and saw the vanaras. He uttered a curse: 'He who killed this demon-buffalo (Dundubhi) and who caused blood to fall in the vicinity of the hermitage and he who is responsible for the destruction of this forest which I have nourished like my own child, shall no longer enter this forest; if he does, he will instantly die. Nor shall his companions enter this forest; if they do, they will instantly become rocks and remain petrified for thousands of years. Today is the last day that they will have access to this forest; if they do not leave this forest now, they will be petrified to- morrow. Hearing this curse and this ultimatum, the vanaras ran to Vali and in answer to his enquiry, informed him of the curse and the ultimatum. Vali himself went to the sage and apologised with his palms joined: but the sage would not listen to him.

"From that time, this forest is out of bounds to Vali and his companions; and therefore it is safe for me to dwell in it. Hence, I have taken refuge in this place. There you see, O Rama, the huge skeletal remains of the mighty Dundubhi. And, these are the trees that Vali would shake with his bare hands and defoliate! Such are his powers and such is his strength."

Laksmana was amused at this narration which clearly expres- sed Sugriva's anxiety and his uncertainty of the outcome of Rama's encounter with Vali. He asked Sugriva: "Well, well, tell me how you can be convinced of Rama's prowess?" Sugriva sug- gested: "Vali kicked Dundubhi and the demon flew four miles and landed here. If Rama could kick the skeleton and throw it to a distance of three hundred yards, I should be convinced. O Rama, I do not belittle your might nor do I frighten you; but having seen Vali's prowess, I am faint-hearted."

Rama went towards the skeleton, lifted it up with his toe and tossed it to a distance of eighty miles. Sugriva was greatly impressed. But a doubt entered his mind: Vali kicked the full body of Dundubhi, whereas Rama tossed only the dry bones! Hence, Sugriva suggested another test: "O Rama, Vali could cut these trees down with a single missile from his weapon. Can you also do so? I am sure you can; yet I want to see you do so. Even as the sun is the

foremost of radiant beings, the Himalayas the foremost of mountains, and the lion is the foremost of animals, even so you are the foremost among men."

sa visrsto balavata banah svarna parişkrtah

bhittva salan giriprastham saptabhumim viveša ha (3)

Hearing the words of Sugriva, Rama playfully readied his weapon, fixed a missile to it and fired it. This gold-plated missile pierced the big trees, pierced the mountain itself and the whole earth, and, the wonder of wonders, returned to Rama. Seeing this, Sugriva bowed to Rama and said to him with his palms joined in salutation: "O Rama, you are indeed supreme and can kill even the god of heaven, Indra. I have no doubt about this. My sorrow has now gone, and I am supremely happy, having got you who are equal to the gods as my friend. O Rama, make haste and destroy my enemy who lives in the form of a brother."

Rama, too, was eager to do so. He said to all of them: "Let us go." And they moved towards Kiskindha where Vali lived. Roaring and shouting, Sugriva challenged Vali to come out. Vali, who was of undoubtedly superior strength, was sur- prised at this effrontery and came out to meet the challenge of Sugriva. Quickly they joined hands in a duel.

The two brothers, Vali and Sugriva, struck each other and kicked each other. The fighting was fierce. Rama, Laksmana and the others watched this terrible fighting from be- hind trees which stood at a distance. Though Rama stood with his weapon in readiness to shoot the most deadly missile, he did not shoot because he could not make out who Vali was and who Sugriva was! They resembled each other so much that Rama was undecided. Naturally, Sugriva was severely wounded, and he flew from the place and rushed up the Ṛsyamuka hill. Vali chased him right up to the foot of the hill and then with- drew.

Rama sought the presence of Sugriva immediately. Sugriva was terribly disappointed and disheartened. He said to Rama: "O Rama, you have let me down terribly. You could have told me earlier that you did not want to kill Vali, and I would not have ventured to go to him." Rama explained: "I could not make out who was who! I did not want to discharge the missile, lest I should kill you. To kill one to whom I have given asylum would be a great

sin. Please go again. But this time wear something to distinguish you from Vali! In this way I may know who is who when both of you close in on each other to fight the duel." At Rama's instruction, Laksmana gathered some wild flowers known as Gajapuspi, made a garland of it and put this garland around the neck of Sugriva. All of them went to Kiskindha once more.

prannamanti hi ye tesam muninam bhavitatmanaṁ

na tesam asubham kimcic charire rama dṛsyate (13.26)

Sugriva led the way. Laksmana followed close on his heels. Then came Rama himself. Behind him were Hanuman, and the other companions of Sugriva. They proceeded towards Kişkindha. They saw numerous trees laden heavily with flowers. They passed by mountains and caves. They beheld wild animals and birds. They saw many deer roaming the forests. And they saw elephants, too.

Then they entered a charming grove which interested Rama. Sensing that it was of special significance, Rama asked Sugriva to relate to him any story which might be connected with it. Sugriva then narrated the following story to Rama: "O Rama, this hermitage is the abode of the seven sages known collectively as the Saptajana. They were highly self-controlled sages who re- mained forever suspended with their heads down, and who lay down on water. They ate once in seven days. After thus performing austerities for seven thousand years they ascended to heaven with their bodies. No wild animal or bird dares to visit this grove; and divine fragrance as well as celestial music issues from this place all the time. They who devoutly bow to these seven sages here do not suffer any physical ailment, O Rama. Hence, it behoves you and Laksmana too, to bow down to the sages here and receive their blessings:" Rama and Laksmana did so.

Armed with their weapons and their missiles, Rama, Laksmana and the vanaras entered Kişkindha. Sugriva was itching for a fight. He said to Rama: "O Rama, we have reached Kişkindha where Vali dwells. Pray, be sure to destroy him this time." Rama re- assured him with these words: "O Sugriva, you have been garlanded by Laksmana with these Gajapuspi flowers which shine around your neck, distinguishing you from Vali. Let me see him once and he will immediately fall dead. The end of your misfortune, the end of your fear and grief is near, O Sugriva. If I fail to fulfil my promise to you, then you can accuse me. I do not boast lest there should be transgression of

dharma; but I tell you in truth that I shall fulfil my promise today. Go forth and roar aloud. This will surely attract the attention of Vali who will then come out to accept your challenge, for heroes do not brook a challenge without returning the courtesy."

Sugriva advanced towards the palace of Vali and roared. This sound was so powerful and heart-rending that the birds and the beasts were scattered by it. This further encouraged Sugriva who ran closer to Vali's abode yelling all the time!

tada hi tara hitameva vakyam tam valinam pathyam idam babhaşe

na rocate tad vacanam hi tasya kalabhi pannasya vinašakale (15.31)

Hearing Sugriva's yelling once again, Vali was terribly annoyed. His vanity was hurt. His anger was roused. And, there- fore, his radiance was eclipsed as it were. Vali, the mighty hero of immeasurable strength could not tolerate this insult to his valour. He rushed out of his apartment.

Tara, his wife, however, intervened and politely said to him: "Lord, I wish you would not rush out to meet Sugriva like this. It is better to reflect over this new development and take stock of the situation and then fight if necessary after some time. Sugriva was badly wounded and made to flee a little while ago. He has now returned. Surely, he has someone to help him. Sugriva is clever. He would not trust an ally whose strength he has not carefully tested. This should be considered.

"Moreover, I heard a little while ago a rumour in the countryside. This rumour was confirmed by your son Angada who had the intelligence reports brought in by the spies. Rama and Laksmana, the sons of Dasaratha, have arrived in this territory. Rama and Sugriva have entered into a friendship. Rama is mighty, and he is also the abode of dharma. Therefore, I consider that hostility with Rama is unwise. I am advising you out of affection, not because I find fault with you, O Lord. Let there be no enmity between you and your brother Sugriva, but let there be forbearance, and let there be friendship with Rama, too. Let Sugriva be prince regent and let love be restored between you brothers. Surely, your brother deserves your love and affection."

This wise counsel did not please Vali who had reached the end of his life-span. He said sternly to Tara: "Thank you for your advice. You have done

your job. You have shown me enough affection. Now you may return home. I shall return after subduing the arrogant Sugriva. I cannot tolerate his insulting behaviour." Tara could only invoke the blessings of God on Vali.

The two mighty brothers immediately joined in the fiercest battle. Vali hit Sugriva; and Sugriva vomited blood profusely. Sugriva hit Vali with a big tree: and Vali reeled under the impact. However, soon Vali got the upper hand and began to belabour Sugriva with all his might. Thus tormented, Sugriva continued to fight, looking around, as if seeking help.

Rama knew that the time had come for him to intervene. He fixed a dreadful missile to his weapon and fired it. The missile, when fired, left the weapon with the sound of thunder and struck the chest of Vali. Hit by this missile, Vali, the mighty warrior who was radiant with valour, fell.

damah samah ksama dharmo dhṛtih satyam parakramah

parthivanaṁ guna rajan danḍascapy aparadhisu (18)

But, Vali did not die. He wore a celestial chain which had been given to him by Indra, the chief of the gods, and which preserved his life-force, radiance and charm. But the missile of Rama, with which he had been hit, had illumined his path to heaven and had brought him to the supreme state.

Rama and Laksmana went forward to where he lay on the ground. Looking at them, and in courteous words but harsh tone, Vali addressed Rama: "Born of the great emperor Dasaratha, O Rama, you have committed an unrighteous act. You shot me while I was fighting someone else; you shot me from a place of hiding. People glorify you that you are righteous, devoted to truth, compassionate, etc. I thought all this was true. So, though Tara my wife had heard that you were here as an ally of Sugriva, I fought with him. No one would expect you to strike me in an unchivalrous manner.

"Rama, I have given you no offence at all: I did not encroach upon your territory, nor invade your capital nor did I commit an act of aggression against you. Yet, you sought to kill me, while I was fighting another person! Yet, again, you appear in the disguise of a righteous person, wearing a matted lock and deer-skin and bark of trees. Peaceful negotiation, charity, forgiveness, dharma, truth, firmness, valour, and also the punishment of criminals -- these are the qualities of kings. We are primitive jungle folk living like animals on Fruits and roots. People usually fight for land, gold

and beautiful women; but we have none of these here! Yet, you have sought to kill me, for no apparent reason. Having perpetrated this crime of indiscriminate killing, what will you tell the holy men concerning yourself? Neither my skin nor my flesh is of any use either. Five animals endowed with claws are allowed to be eaten by brahmanas and ksatriyas (princes and warriors) : they are the rhinoceros, the porcupine, the iguana, the hare, and the turtle. But people do not even touch my skin or my flesh, and the meat from my body is forbidden; and yet I, who am endowed with five fingers and toes, have been killed. You have transgressed the bounds of dharma; you have broken the code of morality.

"My wife Tara did tell me about your arrival here, and of your friendship with Sugriva to achieve your mission. Had you told me of your misfortune, I would have brought your wife back in no time! I would have roped Ravana alive and brought him to you. I suppose my end is near; no one can escape death. But, what is your justification for bringing about my end?"

sukşmah parama durjñeyah satam dharmah plavangama

hrdisthah sarvabhutanam atma veda subha subham (15)

Rama replied:

"You do not know dharma, or worldly affairs, or the laws governing enjoyment, nor the people's behaviour in different conditions and circumstances: and yet you blame me. The whole earth belongs to the kings descended from Manu and therefore my forefather Iksvaku. The present ruler in the dynasty of the Iksvaku is my noble brother Bharata. He is the supreme monarch of the whole earth: and I derive my mandate from him, to ensure that all the subjects of that noble emperor observe the laws of virtue.

"I consider that you are the worst among sinners. I shall tell you why. According to the code of righteousness, one's elder brother, father and one's teacher are to be treated as one's father. In the same way, one's younger brother, son and disciple should be regarded as one's son. Yet, here you are: you are living with your younger brother's wife who is like a daughter to you! Dharma is extremely subtle and difficult to understand; and the conduct of the virtuous is difficult to un- derstand; only the Self dwelling in the hearts of all knows what is right and what is wrong. The first and foremost reason why I struck you down was: you are living in sin with your

younger brother's wife, and I as a representative of the emperor con- sider it my duty to mete out this punishment to you. There is in connection with this the well known commandment: 'By undergoing the just punishment meted out by the king, the criminal is purified and goes to heaven. If the criminal goes unpunished, the king is guilty of the crime.' Even mighty ones have been thus punished: and others have carried out expiatory actions to get rid of sins.

"Secondly, Sugriva is my friend, even as Laksmana is. I have given him my word of honour that his kingdom and his wife shall be restored to him. It is my duty therefore to honour this promise.

"You might ask, why I did not fight directly with you and kill you. I say: people kill wild animals or animals which serve as meat from a place of hiding or without any provocation. Hence, it was right on my part to kill you whether you were fighting with me or not, for you are of the same species as forest-dwelling animals. Thus relieved of your sin by accepting the rightful punishment, you will ascend to heaven, O vanara."

Vali retracted his accusation and apologised for the harsh words he had uttered. He then begged of Rama: "Pray, let Angada be properly looked after. I know that he (Sugriva) who has your guidance will rule efficiently and justly. But my only anxiety concerns my son Angada." Rama reassured him in this regard.

kalo nihsaṁsayo nunam jivitantakaras tava

balad yenavapannosi sugrivas yavašo vašam (20.14)

When the mighty Vali fell, the vanaras fled. When Tara heard the shocking news, she ran to where he was. She saw the fleeing vanaras and questioned them: "Why are you vanaras run- ning away, abandoning the mighty king whom you accompanied so far?" The vanaras quickly warned Tara: "Pray, dear Queen, do not go near where the king's body lies now. Vali is dead; but your son Angada is alive. It is better to protect him from the deadly missiles of that mighty Rama whose valour we have witnes- sed. Ah, with his missiles he powdered rocks and trees: his missiles are like lightning and have the power of lightning. We have never seen or heard of such missiles. Let us quickly re- turn and guard Kiskindha: any moment now, the

victorious Sugriva along with Hanuman and others might storm the territory."

The noble Tara was not afraid. She said: "Nay, I shall go to where my blessed husband lies. I have lost him: what shall I do with the kingdom or with Angada?" Soon she saw Vali fallen on the ground -- the same Vali whose valour rivalled that of the king of heaven, Indra. She saw Rama and Laksmana and also Sugriva standing nearby.

Tara collapsed by the side of Vali's body and lamented: "Lord, why do you not speak to me today? Why have you abandon- ed me? Surely, the earth is dearer to you than me, O ruler of the earth, and hence today you have abandoned me and you embrace the earth with your limbs. O mighty hero, you have paid the penalty for living with Sugriva's wife. Nay, I do not find fault with you, nor accuse you. Time alone is your killer your time had come and therefore you who could not be subdued by anyone in the world have been trapped by Sugriva. I have never known sorrow, Lovingly protected as I was by you: but now I shall have to live as a miserable widow. Your son Angada: who knows what his fate will be now? Ah, well, Rama has fulfilled the promise he had given to Sugriva, to kill you and to restore his kingdom and his wife to him. Sugriva will surely be happy and will rejoice. Brushing aside my warning counsel, you rushed to meet with your own end, O Lord. What shall we, your devoted wives, do now?" All the wives of Vali joined in the lament. They all prayed to the departed Vali: "Lord, if we had done anything to incur your displeasure, kindly forgive us." They devoutly touched his feet and shed profuse tears.

Tara who was thus lamenting the death of Vali, along with the other wives of the hero, resolved to fast unto death at the very place where Vali was slain.

na cati pranayah karyah kartavyo 'pranayasca te

ubhayam hi mahan dosas tasmadantaradrg bhava (22.23)

The wise Hanuman said to Tara: "O noble lady, after leaving this world, every being gets the due reward for the good and evil actions performed here. One who should be pitied grieves for another. Who should grieve for whom -- the dead or the living -- when physical life is like a bubble here! Therefore, turn your mind away from this fruitless grief and apply it to the

protection of Angada and to the performance of the funer- al of the departed hero. Vali has discharged his duty in this world and he has surely reached the blessed state of righteous monarchs. It is now your turn to discharge the duties allotted to you, O Queen! Let Angada be crowned king and let the funeral rites be performed for Vali."

However, Tara was inconsolable. She replied: "A hundred Angadas will not equal in my eyes one Vali, my dearly beloved lord. You may all go your way: my place is here, where my lord fell."

Of course, Vali was not dead, for he still wore the golden chain which protected his vital force. He opened his eyes and looked at Sugriva and said: "Brother, do not blame me for what- ever happened. I think that we were not meant to be happy to- gether: hence all this came to be. I shall soon quit this body and this world. I wish that you should be king after me. Pray, listen to my requests and accede to them. First and foremost : kindly look after my son Angada. He is equal in valour and might to me. He has had a comfortable life: let him not be subjected to unhappiness. Secondly, do not disregard the counsel of Tara. She is never wrong. Thirdly, get busy to accomplish the purpose of Rama. Not to do so would be breach of trust and might well cost you your very life. Lastly: I shall give you this divine golden chain as my parting gift. Wear this. Its lustre and its protecting power might wane as soon as I die. So let me transfer it to you even before." Vali took off that chain and gave it to Sugriva. He knew death was near.

Finally, he said to his son Angada: "My child, consider well the time and place before doing anything. Endure the pleasant and the unpleasant, happiness and unhappiness. Be obedient to Sugriva. Do not take undue advantage of Sugriva, as you could of me. Be friendly with his friends and treat his enemies as yours. However, avoid excessive affection and hate towards all: both these are evil; tread the middle path."

Vali's soul left his body. All the vanaras lamented aloud. They recounted his mighty exploits, particularly his encounter with the celestial named Golabha who fought for fifteen years but was slain by Vali. Tara collapsed near the body of Vali.

ma virabharye vimatim kuruşva loko hi sarvo vihito vidhatra

tam caiva sarvam sukhaduhkhayogam lokobravit tena krtam vidhatra

Tara again wailed: "Ah great hero! Your body is completely covered with blood and mud; and the presence of the missile which has pierced your heart also prevents me from embracing your body. Fate is in Sugriva's favour now. Hence, he is victorious. My own sorrow makes me feel that a girl should never be given in marriage to a hero, for sooner or later she has to suffer this agony of separation from him. She may be wealthy and have many sons; yet, she is a widow. I pleaded with you to desist from this fight; you did not like my plea; I could not prevent you from fighting. Now that you are dead, we are all dead."

When Sugriva saw all this, he was terribly shaken. He approached Rama and said in a voice choked with grief: "O Rama, indeed you have shown superhuman valour and might: and you have slain the powerful Vali. But, now that he is dead, my heart turns away from the kingdom. On account of great anger and hate I wanted the death of my brother; now that he is dead, my heart is tormented with grief. He would never kill me. Even when he could have, he would merely tell me: 'Go away and don't do this again.' But I have been the cause of his death. He was noble; I am ignoble. He was virtuous; I am sinful. Who will absolve me of this sin, O Rama? I do not deserve the esteem of the people; I do not deserve the throne; how can I, O Rama, after I have committed this terrible sin which is unrighteous and which is destructive to the whole race? Grant me leave, O Rama: let me enter into the fire. The other vanaras will surely fulfil your mission and find Sita for you." These words caused great sorrow and concern to Rama.

At the same time Tara beheld Rama and moved towards him. She said: "Your glory is immeasurable, O Rama. You are an embodiment of dharma. I have just one prayer to offer you. Please grant it. In the same manner in which you killed my husband, kill me, too, so that I may re-join him. You know the pangs of separation from one's own wife; let my husband not suffer them. You will not sin by killing me, a woman: for I am but the other half of my husband. Such is the declaration of the Vedic texts, that wife is identical with the husband."

Dissuading her from the wish to die, Rama said to her: "O heroine, do not allow the mind to entertain such wrong thoughts. The universe has been created by the Lord who has so ordained that happiness and unhappiness should be inseparable from the world. This is the universal law. Therefore

give up this grief which is unworthy of the wives of heroes." This appeased Tara.

niyatih karanam loke niyatih karmasadhanaṁ

niyatih sarvabhutanaṁ niyogesviha karanaṁ (4)

Rama addressed all of them:

"A show of grief does not promote but does impede the progress of the departed soul to its own freedom. Yet, it is good to observe traditional mourning. You have shed enough tears. Now let the funeral rites be duly undertaken.

"Niyati (Time or the inner controller of things or the law of cosmic motion) is the sole cause of everything in this world. And this mysterious force alone is the instrument of action, too. It is this law of cosmic motion that prompts all activities. No one does anything in this world; no one prompts any one to do anything either; all beings manifest their nature, and nature is rooted in the eternal law or Time which alone is the inner prompter. Time does not transcend itself; strictly adhering to its nature, it does not transgress its own bounds. Time (or the law of motion) has no friend nor relation, it is not prompted by motives nor does it seek to overpower anyone: it has no relationships at all, and it is not subject to anyone's will. Yet, the intelligent and wise man can easily discern the changes brought about by time: and one can see that dharma, worldly prosperity and enjoyment are all attained by one in course of time.

"Vali has fulfilled his duty and has reached the highest abode. It is good that all of you should give up your grief and organise the funeral. It is good to do it at the proper time."

Laksmana took charge of the funeral operations. Under his directions, the different vanaras got all the necessary articles together, including a lovely palanquin in which to carry Vali's body to the crematorium. One of the vanaras rushed into a huge cave and immediately emerged with the palanquin. Sugriva and Angada lifted up Vali's body and placed it on the palanquin. The body was then carried to the crematorium. Vanaras preceded the palanquin, paving the way with jewels instead of the usual flower petals. All the vanara-women wailed aloud: and their lament made it look as if the whole forest were mourning the hero.

The body was lowered at the spot chosen for the cremation. Once again, Tara fell upon the body of her lord and wailed inconsolably, placing his head on her lap. Then, they placed the body on the pyre. Angada offered fire to the pyre in accordance with the tradition and humbly went round the burning pyre.

After the cremation, all the vanaras bathed in the river, offered libations to the departed soul and returned to their homes. Sugriva approached Rama.

upakareṇa viras tu pratikareṇa yujyate

akṛtajno 'pratikṛto hanti sattvavatam manah (27.45)

Hanuman said to Rama: "By your grace, O Rama, Sugriva has gained this kingdom of Kiskindha. When you permit him, he will triumphantly enter the territory and be crowned king. Rama, you will love the Kiskindha territory." Rama quickly replied to him: "I shall not enter Kiskindha, O Hanuman. My father's command implies that I should not enter a village or a town. Let Sugriva be crowned immediately." And to Sugriva, Rama said: "As soon as you are yourself crowned, install Angada on the throne, too, as the crown prince. I see that the rainy season has just commenced; and it will last four months. It is unsuitable for the work that lies before us. Hence, you can spend those four months in Kiskindha devoting that period to the affairs of the state; and I shall spend that period here in a But, soon after the rainy season, please take quick steps to destroy Ravana and bring Sità back to me."

Sugriva entered Kiskindha. The vanaras cheered him and welcomed him. The leaders of the vanaras gathered all the articles needed to crown him king. They kindled the sacred fire to the accompaniment of Vedic chants. They crowned him king. In accordance with the commands of Rama, Sugriva installed Angada on the throne as crown prince. Sugriva sought the presence of Rama again and conveyed to him the news of the coronation and, having regained Ruma his wife, he re-entered his apartments in Kiskindha.

Rama and Laksmana took up their abode on the nearby mount Prasravana. They selected a cave on the mountainside, which was spacious and also well ventilated. On the northern side, there was a lovely mountain whose peak looked like a cloud. On the southern side there was another mountain which

was snow-capped. And, there was a river flowing nearby. The cave was not far from Kiskindha, either: they could actually listen to the music and the sound of the drums which issued from Kiskindha as the happy vanaras danced expressing their joy. However, Rama did not find happiness there, without Sita, who was dearer to him than his very life.

When Rama expressed his grief, Laksmana tried to console him, and added: "I am merely reviving your own power and wisdom but not teaching you." Rama replied: "I have thrown off this grief which is an obstacle to all undertakings. I am eagerly awaiting the arrival of winter when Ravana will be conquered and Sita regained. I am sure Sugriva will do this for me. A hero rewards help with reciprocity; the ungrateful man who does not repay the debt he owes is shunned by good men."

vrtta yatra narendragam sena pratinivartate

vairaṇi cai 'va margas ca salilena samfkṛtab (53)

The rainy season had set in. To assuage the pain of separation from Sita, Rama described poetically the beauty and the grandeur of the season. He said to Laksmana:

"Behold, O Laksmana, the onset of the monsoon. That season is upon us during which nothing can be done to recover Sita. The sky which received water-vapour from the oceans, held it there for nine months, as it were, is now delivering water! Black clouds are stacked up: and they look like steps and it looks as though one could ascend these steps and garland the sun! The evening clouds are red and you can at the same time see white clouds around them: it looks as if somebody's bleeding wounds have been dressed in white bandage. The earth is both hot and wet with streams of water: it reminds me of sita who is burning with anguish and weeping for me. The mountains appear like religious students: the dark clouds are like deer-skin around the waist, the streams like the sacred thread, and the sound coming from the caves is like OM. Look at that lightning surrounded by dark cloud: like Sita struggling in the grip of Ravana.

"Those trees laden with flowers and the others dripping with water, as if they were shedding tears, awaken in me love for Sita. Cows and bulls seeking each other's company make me long for Sita. Listen to this jungle orchestra, O Laksmana : the bees playing stringed instruments, the frogs

vocalising the drum-beats, and the rain-bearing clouds playing the drums. And look at these peacocks dancing merrily. Clouds obscure the sun throughout the day so that one can only surmise that the sun has set by the behaviour of the birds and the beasts. The torrential rains have put an end to the hostility of the rival kings and also to the movement of traffic on the roads.

"Elsewhere: in Ayodhya, Bharata must have completed all the preparations for the rainy season and must now be observing the vows connected with this season. Sarayu is probably in flood. In Kiskindha, Sugriva is enjoying life, having recovered his wife and his kingdom. But my grief is boundless; the monsoon season seems endless; Ravana is a terrible enemy difficult to overcome: thus everything appears to me. I hope Sugriva, after resting for some time, offers to help me of his own accord. That indeed is the characteristic of a true friend. I hope he does not prove to be ungrateful. Because of the difficulties involved in undertaking expeditions during the rainy season, I did not press him to undertake the task immediately. I am eagerly awaiting the pleasure of Sugriva and the end of the rains."

Laksmana reassured Rama that Sugriva would indeed fulfil his pledge and thus consoled Rama.

samtyajya sarvakarmaṇi mitrarthe yo na vartate

sambhramad vikṛtotsahah so 'narthena 'varudhyate (14)

The rainy season had departed. The skies were clear. Lightning and thunderclouds had ceased. But Hanuman saw that king Sugriva was engrossed in the enjoyment of the pleasures of the senses and had forgotten his duty, the due performance of which would earn for him both earthly good fortune and dharma. Indeed, he even neglected the affairs of the state, which he had delegated to his ministers, and had isolated himself from the people: he had entirely given himself up to sense-indulgence. There was no threat to his sovereignty, now that Vali had been killed, thanks to the prowess of Rama. But Hanuman saw the danger of unrighteousness, of neglecting duty.

Hanuman knew the art of persuasion and the use of words. Humbly and gently he approached Sugriva, and by singing his praises pleased him, brought delight to his mind. Then, in the following words, he brought home

to the king what was beneficial, truthful and appropriate, in words wisely portraying a mixture of displeasure and pleasure, and bearing the stamp of trust- worthiness and certainty:

"O King, you have regained your kingdom and your wife. Your work has thus been accomplished. Now, the work of your friend remains. In this world, O King, he who renders timely help to his friends prospers; his fame grows and his power grows, too. That king to whom his treasury, his armed forces, his friends and himself are of equal importance rules over a mighty kingdom. Hence, one should abandon everything and serve one's friends; else, one invites disaster. Again, such service must be timely: spectacular service rendered to a friend after the time for such service has passed defeats its purpose. Therefore, pray, let Rama's work be undertaken and ways and means adopted to discover and recover Sita. Rama does not remind you of his mission, though surely he is anxious to have it accomplished soon, because he is in your hands now. Moreover, we should not forget that Rama is powerful and capable enough to destroy even gods and demi-gods, let alone demons: yet, he is waiting to see if you will fulfil your promise. Service of Rama is good in itself: and even if he had done nothing for you, it would have been praiseworthy to serve him. How much more so when he has rendered inestimable service to you! Hence, pray, command the vanaras to search for Sita. We shall all of us obey your command and shall not rest till Sita is found."

Sugriva commended this advice and commanded that all the vanaras be quickly summoned to Kiskindha. He decreed: "Anyone who does not turn up within fifteen days from now will lose his life." Thus general conscription was ordered by Sugriva.

kim arya kamasya vašaṁgatena kim atma paurusya parabhavena

ayam hriya saṁhriyate samadhih kim atra yogena nivartate na (16)

Dwelling in the cave, along with Laksmana, Rama was count- ing the days of the rainy season. Each day seemed interminable, as long as one whole year, on account of his separation from sita. He noticed at last that the rainy season had really and truly come to an end. Winter was fast approaching. Sugriva ought to have been busy sending vanaras out to look for Sita.

Rama thought: "While we were together in the hermitage, sita used to love the way the crane cried out to its mate: she had the sweet voice of the crane! How does she find any joy now? The asana tree is in full bloom here, and it reminds me of her; when she perceives the asana tree in full bloom, what will she do when she is unable to see me? That lovely Sita whose voice was as sweet as the swans', used to wake up every morning listen- ing to the swans: how does she besport herself now? How miser- able she will be, now that she is without me, when she sees the cakravaka birds flying together in pairs, reminding her of me and my love for her? I do not find any delight while roaming the forest, the banks of the rivers or lakes, without her, my beloved Sita. With her love and longing for me greatly intensified by the onset of early winter, she is surely tormented on account of her separation from me.

Laksmana, who had gone out to fetch fruits, returned and saw Rama seated with a grief-stricken countenance. This was not new: and he knew what was bothering his brother. Laksmana said to Rama: "O noble one! Why do you thus yield to passion; thus deny- ing your own vigour? Grief robs you of the equanimity of your mind. Can you not drive this grief away by means of yoga? Pray, regain composure and peace of mind, and thus regain your inner strength, by means of the practice of yoga (kriya yoga) and the attainment of the yoga of samadhi; you will then enjoy the ability to do what needs to be done. Do not worry about Sita: for she cannot be kept away from you by anyone in the three worlds! No doubt, we should do whatever is necessary, and this we should do with extraordinary efficiency and diligence; and even this ought to be done without becoming anxious about the outcome."

subham va yadi va papaṁ yo hi vakyam udiritam

satyena parigṛhnati sa virah purusottamah (72)

Rama said to Laksmana: "Look, O Laksmana, the rainy season has come to an end. Indra, the god of thunderstorm, has completed his work and has now retired. The clouds have brought their work to a successful conclusion and they are resting, too. The winds that tossed the rain-clouds here and there and made them empty themselves have ceased. The rumbling and the thundering that filled the sky have yielded to utter silence. The mountain-peaks and the forests shine brilliantly, having been thoroughly washed by the rains.

"The sound of cascading water, the croaking of frogs and the cries of peacocks have ceased. Snakes are coming out of their holes. The roads have been washed clean of mud; and they are once again passable, thus inviting kings to march over them. The waters of the rivers and the lakes are pellucid and clear. Cupid, the god of love, is once again roaming the world ready to awaken passion in the hearts of men and women.

"Now is the time for kings to undertake expeditions against their enemies. And this is the time that had been agreed upon for Sugriva to send vanaras out in search of Sita. Yet, I do not see any sign of Sugriva. The four months of the rainy season have passed; to me they looked like a hundred years, grief-stricken as I was on account of my separation from Sita. But, Sugriva has not shown grace towards me. I think that he is neglecting me, feeling that I am a destitute, exiled from the kingdom, outwitted by Ravana, far from home, poor, tormented by passion,' and that I am completely dependent upon him. He himself volunteered to begin the search for Sita as soon as the rainy season came to an end: now he has completely forgotten, the fool. I think you had better go and tell him: 'That ungrateful man who receives favours from his friends promising to reciprocate, and then fails to honour the promise is most wicked. He is a hero, indeed, who fulfils his promise, whether it looks good or not good. Or, do you wish to provoke me to use my missile once more, as I did in order to kill Vali?' Now that his own purpose has been accomplished, Sugriva conveniently forgets his own promise. He has obviously given himself up to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Surely, he does not realise what would happen if my anger were roused and directed against him! Better go and tell him: 'The road that Vali took on his way out of this world is not closed; beware.' Tell him that I shall destroy him and all his people. Say whatever you think is necessary to make him undertake the search for Sita immediately."

Laksmana saw that Rama was angry; and his own anger towards Sugriva was fully aroused.

na hi vai tvad vidho loke papam evan samacaret

kopam aryena yo hanti sa virah purusottamah (6)

Rama's anger and grief roused Laksmana's fury! He said: "It is wicked of Sugriva thus to ignore his promise, Rama. And such wicked people should not be entrusted with the kingdom. I shall send him this very day to the

abode of death where he shall behold his brother Vali. We can then ask Angada to send out vanaras to search for Sita."

Rama pacified Laksmana with the words: "Noble men like you do not contemplate such a sinful action, O Laksmana! The man who destroys anger is a hero, the best among men. Pray, deal with Sugriva as a friend should be dealt with. Lovingly point out to him the urgency of the matter and the righteousness of the cause."

Laksmana, who always did as he was told to do, thereupon considered what he had to say to Sugriva, the latter's possible reaction and the further approach to him: Laksmana was as wise as the guru himself. Yet, full of the anger generated by his brother's anger caused by his love of Sita, he left for Kiskindha. At his approach, the vanaras who were roaming the forests of Kiskindha were frightened: they sensed his anger and knew the danger of encountering him. Quickly they grabbed whatever rocks and trees they could lay their hands on, ready to defend them- selves. Laksmana's rage grew worse. Seeing this, the vanaras dispersed and ran to where Sugriva was.

The leader of the vanaras tried to gain Sugriva's ear to convey the news of Laksmana’s arrival. But Sugriva was too heavily drunk to be able to pay any attention to anything. The ministers of Sugriva could not decide upon the proper course of action and therefore ordered all the vanaras to defend Kiskindha against Laksmana. They rushed back to where Laksmana was. Angada went forward to meet Laksmana and ascertain the cause of his fury. Still furious, Laksmana commanded Angada to announce him to Sugriva at once.

Angada sized up the situation and returned to the palace and caught hold of the feet of both his uncle and his wife Ruma. Sugriva was still inebriated. Then all the frightened vanaras yelled in fear outside the palace. This made Sugriva return to sobriety.

Some of his ministers then submitted: "Rama and Laksmana who are devoted to truth and who wear human appearance are fit to be rulers, though they have given you your kingdom. Laksmana stands at your door; and hence the frightened vanaras yell: Do as Rama did to you, and in good time, Ŏ king; and fulfil your promise to him."

na hi dharma 'rtha siddhyarthaṁ panam evam prasasyate

panad arthas ca dharmas ca kamas ca parihiyate (33.46)

Sugriva said: "I have not insulted Rama nor Laksmana. I have not done anything to offend them. Why is then Laksmana angry with me?" Hanuman very politely submitted to Sugriva: "I think the reason is obvious, O King. You had promised to organise the search for Sita as soon as the rainy season came to an end; the rainy season is at an end, but the search has not started yet. You are unaware of the passage of time. Laksmana has surely come to remind you of this! I think it is best for you to offer your apologies to him and immediately implement your promise."

Angada requested Laksmana to enter the palace. The palace which had seven enclosures, each with its own gate, showed signs of superaffluence.

Laksmana, who possessed an unblemished character, did not enter Sugriva's own inner apartments: still fuming with rage, he stood alone outside. Sugriva heard the rattle of Laksmana's weapon, and knew that he was there as Angada had said. He said to Tara: "Pray, go and find out the cause of Laksmana's wrath. And then Surely, he would not behave unbecomingly with you. come and tell me the truth."

Tara approached Laksmana and asked: "Kindly tell me the reason why you are angry with us." Laksmana was pleased with Tara's conciliatory approach and said: "Sugriva is immersed in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and has lost sight of his promise to us. He is drunk and is never sober. Such drinking is contrary to dharma and the attainment of one's welfare. Drinking is an obstacle to dharma, to material welfare and even to enjoyment of righteous pleasures. Ingratitude is inimical to dharma; and the loss of a friend is inimical to material welfare. And Sugriva is inviting these two by his neglect of his obligation to Rama."

Tara quickly informed Laksmana: "In fact, O Laksmana, Sugriva has already taken steps towards the fulfilment of his promise to Rama. Vanaras have already begun to arrive here in obedience to his command. Yet, I know that he has been negligent. I know the reason for this, too: you do not know the power of lust though you know how powerful anger is. A man subject to lust is unaware of the time and the place, of dharma or of material welfare. Even sages have succumbed to lust; how then do you expect a vanara who

is uncultured to overcome it? Pray, come in and meet Sugriva." Laksmana entered and saw Sugriva seated on his couch with his wife Ruma in his arms. This enraged him further.

brahmaghne ca surape ca goghne bhagnavrate tatha

niṣkṛtir vihita sadbhih kṛtaghne na 'sti niṣkṛtih (34.12)

Profoundly shocked to see Laksmana blazing with anger, Sugriva regained his sobriety. Followed by his queens and others, he humbly approached Laksmana with joined palms.

Laksmana said, still burning with anger: "A righteous king is honoured by all. The unrighteous king who makes false promises is shunned by all. It is said that one who promises to give a horse and does not fulfil that promise suffers the sin of killing a hundred horses. Disregarding one's own promise is suicide, O Sugriva. One who promises to help a friend in return for help received, and goes back upon this promise is sinful and fit to be executed. And there is no atonement prescribed for ingratitude. Though the holy ones have prescribed an atonement for even the killing of a cow, for drinking liquor, and for transgressing a vow, they have none for ingratitude. Ingratitude is unpardonable sin. You are an ungrateful vanara, who has forgotten his promise and who is engaged, on the contrary, in the indulgence of the senses. Shame! Whereas you should be busy in the service of Rama, you are lost in sense- indulgence. Do you also wish to go the way Vali went, a target for Rama's blazing missile? You have not tasted the power of Rama's missiles, and that is why you are behaving like this."

Tara came forward to answer on behalf of Sugriva: she said, "O Laksmana, kindly do not speak thus to Sugriva. He does not deserve those harsh words uttered by you, nor is he culpable of the accusations you have made. Sugriva has not forgotten the debt he owes to the gallant Rama. It is true that having been deprived of sensual pleasures for such a long time, he has fallen into their trap. We are told that the sage Visvamitra spent ten years with the nymph Ghṛtaci as if they were a single day! Sensual pleasure has that power to dull one's perceptions. Surely, lust is very powerful. But, you should not blame Sugriva without first ascertaining the truth and you should not get so angry. Noble men like you do not let anger rise in them without fully comprehending the facts. I am quite certain that Sugriva will renounce his kingdom, wealth, his wife Ruma, me and even Angada, in order to do what

pleases Rama. He will surely kill Ravana and restore Sita to Rama. Vali used to tell us that there are a thousand billion, three hundred and ninety-nine thousand and six hundred demons, in Lanka. All these have to be killed before Ravana can be killed and Sita rescued. All this cannot be done without proper help and suitable organisation. Sugriva has already ordered all the vanaras to report to him soon. All the other tribes in this forest are also to report to him soon. Pray, therefore, give up your anger."

sitam prapasyati dharmatma vadhişyati ca ravanam

sahayamatrena maya raghavah svena tejasa (36.7)

Hearing the humble and polite submission of Tara, Laksmana felt pacified and gratified. He nodded. Sugriva said to Laksmana: "Whatever I have today, O Laksmana, I owe to the grace of Rama. I cannot repay the debt I owe him. Nor does he stand in need of my humble services. By his own prowess, he can kill Ravana and regain Sita; I consider it a blessing that he allows me to assist him in this endeavour. I have not forgotten that with just one missile he pierced the seven giant trees, the yonder mountain and the earth, too! I pray that if I have done anything wrong in my dealing with both of you, out of love or out of neglect, I may be forgiven."

Pleased with Sugriva's demeanour and words, Laksmana said: "In you, O Sugriva, my brother has an excellent friend and helper. You have a pure heart. You are surely fit to be the ruler of the vanaras. With your help, Rama will surely destroy Ravana and regain Sita. For you are a peer to Rama himself in energy and strength. Pray, forgive the harsh words I uttered a few moments ago, on account of my sorrow and impatience."

Sugriva now turned to Hanuman and ordered: "Quickly get the vanaras from the following mountain-ranges: Mahendra, Himalaya, Vindhya, Kailasa and Mandara. Get the vanaras who are black in colour and who have the strength of elephants, who live on the Anjana hill and who can run like wind. Also, other vanaras dwelling on the eastern and western mountains, on the Padma, the Mahasaila, Meru, Dhumra and also the Maharuna mountains. If they disobey my order or delay in coming here, they will lose their lives. Let swift messengers be despatched at once."

This was immediately carried out. All the vanaras who had been commanded by Sugriva thus came to Kiskindha quickly. Vast hordes of

vanaras moved towards Kiskindha. Thirty million vanaras of black colour, a hundred million vanaras of golden colour from the western mountain, millions of vanaras of the colour of the lion's mane from the Kailasa mountain ranges, millions more from the Himalayan ranges, more from the Vindhyas, and countless vanaras from the shores of 'the ocean of milk' and a distant continent known as Tamalavana all of them arrived in Kiskindha, bearing various presents to king Sugriva. Some of them halted at the site of a sacred rite performed earlier to propitiate lord Siva; here they ate ethereal fruits and roots which had the power to free one from hunger for a month! They said to Sugriva: "Vanaras from all the mountains and the forests are here." Pleased with them, Sugriva accepted their offerings.

sa vrksagre yatha suptah patitah pratibudhyate (38.22)

Sugriva was happy. With the help of the vanaras that had arrived, Rama's mission was as good as accomplished. Laksmana said to Sugriva: "Let us go to Rama." Sugriva agreed' enthusiastically and ordered his body-guards to fetch his excel- lent vehicle. Soon this vehicle which was plated in gold and had a lovely white hood arrived. Laksmana ascended it along with Sugriva.

Surrounded by just the leaders of the vanara-hordes, Sugriva sought the presence of Rama. Seeing Rama at distance, Sugriva descended from the vehicle and stood humbly with his palms joined in salutation. All the vanara leaders did like- wise, too. Rama saw in front of him what looked like an ocean of vanaras. He was highly pleased.

Sugriva fell at the feet of Rama; and Rama lovingly lifted him up and embraced him. Rama then lovingly and gently addressed Sugriva: "There is a time for acquiring religious merit, dharma, O Sugriva. And, there is a time for working for material prosperity and for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. But, one who neglects dharma and worldly duties and is engrossed in sense-indulgence wakes up too late, like the man who sleeps on the branches of a tree and wakes up after falling from it. Now is the time for taking the necessary steps to search for Sita."

Sugriva repeated what he had said to Laksmana already: "Whatever I have today I owe to you, O Rama. How can I forget the debt I owe you? One who thus forgets the debt he owes a friend is a vile sinner. You see these vanaras: they are the leaders of vanaras. They have come from all over the world,

bringing with them countless vanaras, in order to fight Ravana, and to bring back Sita." Rama was supremely delighted. He said again: "You are my best friend, O Sugriva: and with your help I shall get rid of all my enemies."

As they were thus conversing with each other, there was great tumult. Raising a cloud of dust, all the vanaras marched towards where Rama was. Millions upon millions of vanaras of every description, of every colour and stature, belonging to the various tribes of jungle folk, were there.

Sugriva introduced them to Rama. Standing with his palms joined in salutation to Rama, Sugriva said: "Let these vanara armies be comfortably stationed on the sides of the mountains and in the forests; and let the commanders of the forces bring me correct information concerning their number and strength."

jhayatan mama vaideht yadi jivati va na va

sa ca deŝo maha prajña yasmin vasati ravanah (11)

Later, Sugriva submitted to Rama: "Countless vanaras have arrived, each tribe with its own leaders. All of them are endowed with terrible strength and courage. They await your orders: they are your army." Rama replied: "I think that the first task is to find out whether Sita is still alive or not, where she is and where is that land where Ravana lives. You are more qualified than I am to commission these vanara leaders with appropriate tasks in this connection. You know what is in my mind, and you know what is to be done: and you are, to me, next only to Laksmana in your understanding of the mission and in your wisdom concerning the right manner in which it is to be carried out."

Overjoyed at the confidence that Rama placed in him, Sugriva called upon Vinata, a tribal leader, to conduct the search in the "eastern region". In his briefing of Vinata, Sugriva said: "Go to the eastern region of the earth, Vinata, and thoroughly search for the abode of Ravana and the whereabouts of Sita. Cross the several mighty rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Sarayu and others. Make an intense search in the great territories of Brahmamala, Videha, Kosala and others, too. Search the territories of the golden-coloured Kiratas. Go to the Yavadvipa; go beyond this to the mountain Sisira. Go over to the other shore where you will find the Red Sea. Look for Sita in the forests in the neighbourhood and on the hillsides. Search all the islands in this region.

"When you cross the Red Sea, you will come to an island which is inhabited by an unusual type of demon. They are called Mandehas and they remain suspended from the sides of the mountains. Every morning they are burnt by the resplendence of the sun and of the sages offering prayers; they fall into the water, regain their life and their vitality and get back to the mountainside where they hang upside down again. When you go beyond this, you will see an ocean which is white, which Looks like the ocean of milk. In the middle of this ocean, you will see a white mountain called Ṛsabha. Beyond that ocean you will come to a fresh-water ocean. In the subterranean regions of that ocean you will find a terrible fire raging which is known as Vadavamukha. To the south of the northern shore of this ocean you will find a big mountain with golden lustre. In front of that you will see a thousand-hooded serpent, white like the moon, clad, as it were, in a blue garment: it is the support of the earth. Then you will see the mountain that re- presents the eastern extremity of the earth. Beyond that, and inaccessible, is utter darkness. Search up to this point for Sita. And, report to me in a month."

tatah prasthapya sugrivas tan mahad vanaram balam

daksiṇam presayamasa vanaran abhilaksitan (1)

To search for Sita in the southern region, Sugriva hand- picked the best of the vanaras. Nila, son of Agni, Hanuman. the son of Vayu, the supremely mighty Jambavan (son of the grandfather), and many other mighty vanaras were chosen to constitute this party. He appointed Angada, the son of Vali, and the prince regent himself as the commander of the vanara forces that constituted this search party.

In his briefing, Sugriva specially mentioned those places. which were difficult of access. He said: "Start with the Vindhya mountains, and the plains of the rivers Narmada, Krsna Godavari, and Varada. Thoroughly search the regions of Mekhala, Utkala, Vidarbha, Vanga, Kalinga, Andhra, Cola, Pandya and Kerala. Then proceed to the Malaya mountains, with the blessings of the sage Agastya whom you will see there.

"Proceed from there to the golden gated city of the Pandyas whose city walls are studded with precious stones. Between the city and the hermitage of Agastya is the Mahendra mountain which is full of gold, and which Agastya sank into the ocean. Indra himself visits this mountain every fortnight.

"Beyond this is the inaccessible island which is eight hundred miles wide: it is inaccessible to human beings. Search this island carefully. Surely that is the territory of the powerful Ravana who deserves to be killed. Before you leave that territory make sure that Sita is not there: do not leave anything in doubt.

"Eight hundred miles beyond that island in the ocean is the partly submerged island Puspitaka with its high mountains resembling gold and silver. One hundred and twelve miles beyond Puspitaka is the mountain Suryavan, beyond that Vaidyuta, and beyond that the mountain Kunjara where the sage Agastya has a hermitage which is eighty miles broad, eighty miles high, made of gold and precious gems. There exists the abode of serpents known as Bhogavati. Search this most dreadful place carefully. Search the mountain beyond this, known as Risabha.

"Beyond that is the world of the manes: do not go there. Wherever you go search for Sita carefully. Whoever returns first in a month and says sita has been discovered will enjoy luxuries equal to mine, for he will be most dear to me."

drstayam tu narendrasya patnyam amita tejasah

ketakṛtya bhavisyamah kṛtasya pratikarmaṇa (56)

After the vanaras had been despatched in the southerly direction, Sugriva turned to Susena who had the complexion and appearance of a cloud. Suşeña was the father of Tara, the father-in-law of the king, and had great prowess. Sugriva spoke to him, and to the other vanara leaders, among them the vanara named Marica and the group of vanaras named Martcas (who were the sons of the sage Marici):

"Proceed in the westerly direction, over the Saurastra and the Candracitra territories, as also Bahlika and Kuksi. Search all these territories for sita. Then go to the confluence of the Sindhu river with the ocean. You will find a big mountain there, named Somagiri which has a hundred peaks. On the hill- sides in the delightful forests dwell winged lions which carry away huge fish and also elephants. Search these forests care- fully.

"When you come to the seashore, you will behold a mountain with a golden peak of eight hundred miles, known as the Pari- yatra mountain. A tribe of celestials dwells there: they are powerful. Hence, do not provoke them by

disturbing the forest. But search for Sit there. Near that mountain but in the ocean you will find another mountain named Vajra, which dazzles like diamond and other precious gems. Look well in its caves for Sita.

"In a quarter of the ocean there stands the mountain Cakravan: Visvakarma established there the Sahasrara Cakra, a wheel with a thousand spokes (or a revolver with a thousand chambers). Once lord Visnu killed the demons Pañcajana and Hayagriva and took the conch from the former and the cakra from the latter. There is also the huge mountain known as Varaha. five hundred and twelve miles long, on which is the golden city of Pragjyotisapura, the abode of the demon Naraka. Beyond that is a mountain made of gold entirely, named Megha, on which Indra the god of heaven was crowned by the gods. Beyond that are sixty thousand golden hills, with the mount Meru on which the sage Merusavarpi dwells. Bow to him and ask him about sita. But do not proceed beyond this point.

"Do not tarry longer than a month. Along with you,O heroes, my own father-in-law is sent. This father-in-law of mine is a mighty warrior: you should all obey him. Surely, you are commanders of your own forces; but all of you should treat him as your supreme authority. Thus should you go west in search of Sita. When Sita is found and is restored to Rama, we shall have fulfilled our duty. In your expedition, if you find it expedient to engage yourselves in other activities, please do so!

arthinah karyanirvṛttim akartur api yas caret

tasya syat saphalam janma kim punah purvakarinah (7)

After Susena had departed with his search-party in the westerly direction. Sugriva turned to another mighty vanara named Sataball. He said to Satabali:

"Followed by a large horde of the vanaras and by your own counsellors who are all descendants of the sun, proceed north- ward, O mighty vanara! And let a diligent and thorough search for Sita be carried out by all of you. When we have recovered Sita and handed her to Rama, we shall have accomplished the greatest task of our life. His life alone is fruitful who accomplishes the service of one in need, even if the latter has rendered him no service: how much more vital it is when it is rendered in return for a great service!

"Proceed to the land of the mlecchas, the pulindas, the surasenas. the prasthalas, the bharatas, the kurus and the madras, the kambojas and the yavanas, all lying to the north of here. Search there and search in the Himalayan mountains. Go on to the hermitage of the sage Soma, beyond which is the Kala mountain. Search in the caves for Sitá. Beyond that is the Sudarsana mountain; beyond that Devasakha: search there.

"Beyond that is a desolate stretch of land devoid of mountains, rivers and trees. Get over this quickly. You will see the mount Kailasa. Beyond the Krauñca mountain is the mountain known as Mainaka. When you go over this, You will see the hermitage of siddhas. You will also see women with the faces of horses. Near that you will see the lake Vaikhanasa. Beyond this lake the very sky is illumined by the lustre of the sages who dwell there. Proceed in that direction. You wil1 come across the river Sailoda. On the banks of that river is the territory known as Uttara Kuru. The trees there are laden with flowers and fruits, some of which look like precious stones! From the trees the men and women living there obtain dresses, beds and jewelries. They are very fortunate men and women, and they live there enjoying themselves. No one is un- happy there; and every day they grow in qualities that please the mind. Beyond that is the golden mountain known as Somagiri. They who have reached the world of Indra, the world of Brahma and the celestial world see that mountain. Even when the sun does not shine there, the whole place is illumined by the shining mountain! Lord Vishnu, lord Siva and Brahma live there, surrounded by sages. Do not venture into that region. But search all the other territories. And endeavour your very best to find Sita."

udara sattvabhijano mahatma sa maithilim draksyati vanarendra

disam tu yam eva gata tu sita tam asthito vayusuto hanuman (47. 14)

While Sugriva was thus instructing the leaders of the search-party, Rama was amazed at the detailed and accurate knowledge of the geography of the world which Sugriva possessed. Out of admiration and curiosity, he asked Sugriva how he came to know world geography so well and so thoroughly.

Sugriva replied: "O Rama, you know how Mayavi, the son of Dundubhi, challenged my elder brother Va11, how Val1 chased him into the cave, how I waited outside the cave for a whole year for Vali to emerge after killing the demon. How I saw blood issue from the cave and how I thereby

concluded that Vali had been killed. You also know that thereafter I returned to Kiskindha and was installed on the throne by the ministers. Vali returned after some time, having pushed the stone away from the mouth of the cave where i had placed it, and even though I apologised and begged of him to ascend the throne, Vali was greatly enraged and he pursued me, intent on killing me.

"Then I began to run for my life, O Rama. I went to the easternmost quarter of the earth, and found that Vali stil1 pursued me. I then similarly ran in the four directions. During that flight, I saw every part of the earth, which of course appeared like the footprint of a calf. It was during that period that I acquired an intimate and detailed knowledge of the earth. When I returned to Kiskindha, perplexed and unable to decide what to do, Hanuman said to me: 'I now remember that Vali incurred the displeasure of the sage Matanga who cursed him and forbade him from ever setting foot on the Risyamüka hill; if we go there, Vali will not pursue you. And I quickly came to the Risyamoka hill where I continued to live till recently."

The vanaras who had gone in different directions conducted a diligent search following Sugriva's instructions. They searched everywhere. They left nothing undone, no place unsearched. But they had no success. At the end of one month from the date they left Kişkindha, they returned to Kişkindha in dejection and despair. They reported to Sugriva: O "King. We have searched everywhere. When we saw a powerful person. suspecting him to be Ravana we pursued him, challenged him and even killed him. But we could not find Sita. But surely. Hanuman will attain success. He has gone in the direction in which Sita had been taken."

anirvedam ca dakşyam ca manasas ca 'parajayam

karya siddhikarany Ahus tasmad etad bravimy ahan (49.6)

Angada, Hanuman and others went in the southerly direction. They thoroughly searched the region of the Vindhya mountains. Though they searched everywhere for Sita, they could not find her. In course of time, they reached an utterly desolate region where nothing grew, and there were no birds nor beasts to be seen. In that region there once lived a great sage named Kandu who was a great ascetic and full of spiritual power. It' so happened that during their residence in that region, his son who was just ten years of

age, died. The sage was furious and pronounced a terrible curse on the land that could not support the boy's life! And, so it became desolate.

The vanaras went deep into a terrible forest. They saw an awesome demon there. Angada thought that it was Ravana and in a fierce battle killed him. But, alas, Sita could not be found. The vanaras morale was very low. Enthusiasm was at a low ebb.

Angada said to them: "Pray, friends, do not yield to grief, despair, lethargy and inaction. Enthusiasm which knows no despair, efficiency, a mind that is not overcome by lethargy or dejection these are the aids to the achievement of one's purpose. We should continue our search without the least relaxation of effort. Surely, if you strive earnestly, the fruit of your action is assured. It is also good to remember what our king Sugriva's displeasure means and what a terrible disappointment to Rama it would be." The vanara Gandhamadana applauded Angada's exhortation.

All the vanaras, thereupon, went up the Silver Mountain (Rajata Parvatam) to search for Sita. But they could not find her. They retraced their steps, exhausted and worn out with fatigue.

As they were exploring the caves on the south-western side of the mountain, they discovered an inaccessible cave known as Riksabilam, guarded by a demon. They were hungry and thirsty and they saw that the cave contained plants, trees, birds and geese, from which they inferred that there was water in the cave. The cave was very large and very deep. They penetrated deep into the cave and after some time, they found a spot that was clear and visible. Holding on to each other they went towards the clear spot, with great hope and joy.

In that region, they saw gold, precious gems and stones, luxurious apartments and palaces. Amazed to see all these, they went further; and not far they beheld a radiant ascetic woman, clad in bark and deer-skin. Approaching that woman with humility Hanuman asked: "O holy lady, who are you, what is this cave-dwelling and whose are these precious jewels?"

ihaiva sitam anvisya pravṛttim upalabhya va

no ced gacchama tan viram gamisyamo yamakṣayam (53.37)

In response to Hanuman's enquiry concerning the cave and herself, the ascetic replied: "O mighty vanara, there was a great magician known as

Maya, by whom this cave was built. He was a great builder for the demons in days of yore. He did great penance and thus propitiated Brahma the creator; and Brahma transferred to Maya the vast wealth of the sage Sukra. Having obtained what he wanted to, Maya gave himself to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures with the celestial nymph Hema. When he had thus been weakened. Indra wielded his deadly missile and killed him: and Indra appointed Hema to inherit the vast for- tune that Maya possessed. I am Swayamprabha, the daughter of the sage Merusavarni: and I guard the palace of Hema, who is my dear friend. Pray, appease your hunger and slake your thirst, with these fruits and drinks; and then tell me who you all are".

After refreshing himself and all the vanaras, Hanuman narrated to Swayamprabha the story of Rama up to the point of his meeting with Sugriva, and how they were all in search of Rama's consort Sita. He concluded: "While we were thoroughly exhausted and fatigued and were tormented by hunger and thirst, we saw aquatic birds fly out of this cave and surmised that there would be water inside. You have saved our lives by your hospitality; pray, tell us what we can do to repay the debt we owe you." Swayamprabha replied politely: "I am an ascetic, and do not stand in need of anyone's service." Hanuman said again: "Pray, tell us how to get out of here! For we are in a great hurry and we have already exceeded the time allotted to us." Swayamprabha appreciated their difficulty and asked all of them to close their eyes; and in the twinkling of an eye, they were all out of the cave. Swayamprabha pointed to Hanuman: "That way lies the Prasravana mountain and in the opposite direction is the ocean." She returned to her cave.

All the vanaras assembled to deliberate the next step. They were greatly worried: for, they had already exceeded the time limit set by Sugriva, even when they were in the cave. If they returned later than expected and moreover without any news of Sita, Sugriva would surely have them all executed. Angada said: "Death is certain for us if we return to Sugriva after the lapse of the time limit set by him and without any news of Sita. It is therefore better that we sit down here and fast unto death. In fact I was crowned prince not by Sugriva but by Rama. And, Sugriva who has no great love for me, might take take this opportunity to have me killed." All the vanaras a- greed: "We have surely offended Sugriva and it is not wise nor

safe to go to him now. Let us continue to look for Sita and return to Sugriva after we get some news; or we shall seek to enter the abode of Death."

sa caturnam upayanam tṛtiyam upavarnayan

bhedayamasa tan sarvan vanaran vakya sampada (54.6)

A leader of the vanaras suggested that they should all take refuge in the cave to escape the wrath of king Sugriva. Angada did not turn this suggestion down. And, Hanuman saw in this the birth of a plot which might lead to a fight between Sugriva and Angada. Angada was highly intelligent and was a pastmaster in the art of politics. Hanuman who was wise, there- upon used the third of the four political devices in dealing with an opponent: he created differences of opinion among the vanara-chiefs. He then said to Angada: "You are truly a great hero and very strong. But the vanaras are fickle minded and may not be loyal to you. None of these leaders of the vanaras, not even I, will turn their backs upon Sugriva and follow you. You are antagonising a very powerful hero, which is unwise. And, the worst of all, you think that this cave is safe sanctuary: it is not. Even Indra broke into it and killed Maya. Laksmana's mis- siles will shatter the whole cave in no time. All the vanaras will very soon abandon you, for lack of supplies of food and other amenities. This plan which has been suggested is fraught with great danger. I think it is wiser to return to Kişkindha and beg of Sugriva to forgive the delay. He is a righteous per- son and will not harm you."

Angada retorted in fury: "Whom do you call righteous? Sugriva? He who seduced his elder brother's wife who is like his own mother? He who blocked his own brother's exit from a cave? He who completely forgot the good done to him by Rama, when he had achieved his purpose and was enjoying himself? Do not forget that it was for fear of Laksmana's anger that he sent out all of us to search for Sita, not because he thought it was a righteous cause! Do you think that Sugriva will tole- rate me as prince -- I who am the son of his enemy Vali? It may be that he will not openly kill me or harm me publicly. He will surely devise some secret punishment for me; And it is better to die now than to submit to solitary confinement. No, I am not coming. You may return. Salute him on my behalf and tell him everything. Then tell my mother and also queen Ruma."

Saying so, Angada fell down. All the vanaras followed suit. and decided to fast unto death. In despair and utter dejection, they even cursed the day on which Rama and Sugriva met each other. They were talking loudly about Rama's banishment, the loss of Sità, the death of Jatayu, Rama's killing of Vali so on. Even as they were talking, a great danger hovered over their heads.

vidhih kila naram loke vidhanena 'nuvartate

yatha 'yam vihito bhaksyas ciran mahyam upagatah (56.4)

The sound, the gust of wind and dust preceded the arrival near the cave of a huge vulture. The vanaras who were seated on a flat surface outside the cave saw the vulture perched on a big rock. The vulture was known as Sampati and was the brother of Jatayu. It said to itself: "Surely, unseen providence is in control of the whole world. By that benign providence it has been decreed that my food should thus arrive at my very door, as it were. As and when each one of these vanaras dies I shall eat the flesh." The vanaras, however, heard this and were greatly disturbed.

With a mind agitated by intense fear, Angada said to Hanuman: "Death has come to us, disguised as a vulture. But, then, did not the noble Jatayu give up his life in the service of Rama. Even so we shall die in his service. Jatayu suffered martyrdom while actually trying to help sita; but we, unfortunately, have not been able to find where she is."

Sampati heard this. His mind was now disturbed. He asked: "Who is there who mentioned the name of my dearly beloved brother Jaṭayu? I have not heard from him or of him for a very long time. Hearing of his murder my whole being is shaken. How did it happen?"

Even after this, the vanaras were sceptical: however, they helped Sampati get down from the rock. Angada then related the whole story of Rama, including his friendship with Sugriva and the killing of Vali. He concluded: "We were sent in search of Sita. We cannot find her. And the time-limit set by Sugriva has expired. Afraid to face him, we have decided to fast unto death, lying here."

Sampati said: "Jatayu was my brother. Both of us flew to the abode of Indra when the latter had killed the demon Vrtra. Jatayu was about to faint, while we were near the sun. And I shielded him. By the heat of the sun my wings

were burnt and I fell down here. Though wingless and powerless, I shall help you in my own way, O vanaras, for the sake of Rama. Some time ago, I saw a beautiful lady being carried away by Ravana: she was crying: O Rama, O Laksmana'. He dwells in Lanka, an island eight hundred miles from here. There, I can actually see Ravana and also Sita living in Lanka, on account of the strength of my vision. I can also see through intuition that you will find Sita before returning to Kişkindha. Now, take me to the seaside so that I can offer libations for the peace of my brother's soul. The vanaras gladly obliged Sampati.

tiksna kamas tu gandharvas tiksna kopa bhujangamah

mrganam tu bhayam tiksnam tatas tiksna ksudha vayam (59.9)

Jambavan who heard Sampati mention that he had seen sita, approached Sampati and asked: "Pray, tell me in detail where Sita is and who has seen her?" Sampati replied:

"Indeed, my son Suparŝva had an even more direct encounter with Ravana and Sita than I had. I shall narrate the story to you in detail. Please listen.

"I told you that in a foolhardy attempt to fly to the sun, my wings got burnt. I fell down wingless on this mountain. Just as the celestials are excessively lustful, snakes possess terrible anger, deer are easily frightened, and we vultures are voracious eaters. How could I appease insatiable hunger when I had no wings? My son Suparŝva volunteered to supply me with food regularly. One day, recently, he failed to appear at the usual time, and I was tormented by hunger. When I took him to task for that lapse, he narrated what had happened that day. He said: 'I was looking for some meat to bring to you for your meal. At that time I saw a big demon flying away with a lady in his arms. I stopped him, wishing to bring both of them for your meal today. But he begged of me to let him go: who could deny such a request? So I let him go. Later, some of the sages in the region exclaimed: "By sheer luck has Sita escaped alive today." After they had flown away, I went on looking in that direction for a considerable time, and I saw that lady dropping ornaments on the hills. I was delayed by all this, O father! It was from my son Suparsva that I heard about the abduction of Sita in the first place. I could not challenge and kill Ravana, because I had neither wings nor the strength for it. But I shall render service to Rama in my own way.

"There lived on this mountain a great sage named Nisakara. On the day that Jatayu and I flew towards the sun and on which my wings had been completely burnt, I fell down here. I remained unconscious for some time. Later I regained consciousness. With great difficulty I reached the hermitage of the sage, as I was eager to see him. After some time I saw him coming to the hermitage, surrounded by bears, deer, tigers, lions and snakes! When he entered the hermitage, they returned to the forest. He merely greeted me and went in. But soon he came back to where I was and said: 'Are you not Sampati? Was not Jatayu your brother? Both of you used to come here in human forms, to salute me. Ah, I recognise you. But tell me who has burnt your wings and why have they been burnt?'"

upalairiva samchanna drsyate bhub silocchayaih

apagabhisca samvita sutrair iva vasundhara (61.8)

Sampati continued: "My physical condition and the loss of wings and vitality prevented me from giving a complete account of our misadventure. However, I said to the sage: 'Determined to pursue the sun, we flew towards it. We soared high into the sky. From there we looked at the earth: the cities looked like cart-wheels! We heard strange noises in the space. The mountains on earth looked like pebbles; the rivers looked like strings which bound the earth: The HimaLaya and the Vindhya appeared to be elephants bathing in a pond. And our sense of sight was playing tricks with us. It looked as if the earth were on fire. We then concentrated on the sun to get our bearings right. It looked as big as the earth. Jatayu decided to return. I followed him. I tried to shield him against the fierce rays of the sun; and my wings were burnt. Jatayu fell in Janasthana, I think. I am here on the Vindhya. What shall I do now? I have lost everything. My heart seeks death which I shall meet by jumping off a peak."

"The sage, however, contemplated for a while and said: 'Do not despair. You will get back your wings, sight, life force and strength. A prediction have I heard: soon the earth will be ruled by king Dasaratha whose son Rama will go to the forest in obedience to his father's will, and there Rama will lose his wife Sita in search of whom he will send vanaras. When you inform the vanaras where Sita is kept in captivity, you will gain new wings. In fact, I can make your wings grow now: but it is better you get them after rendering a great service to Rama. Soon afterwards, the sage left this world.

"I have impatiently been waiting for you all, all these hundreds of years. I have often thought of committing suicide; but I have abandoned the idea every time, knowing that I have an important mission in life. I even scolded my son the other day for his having let Ravana get away with Sita; but I myself could not pursue Ravana."

As Sampati was speaking thus, new wings sprouted from his sides, even as the vanaras were looking on. The vanaras were delighted. Sampati continued: "It is by the grace of the sage Nisakara that I have regained these wings, O vanaras. And, the sprouting of these wings is positive proof that you will be successful in finding Sita."

Sampati flew away, in an attempt to see if he could still fly! The vanaras had abandoned the idea of fasting unto death. They had regained their enthusiasm and their morale. They set out once again in search of sita.

visadoyam prasahate vikrame paryupasthite

tejasa tasya hinasya purusartho na sidhyati (64.12)

Sampati's words inspired confidence in the vanaras, but that enthusiasm lasted only till they actually faced the ocean itself. They reached the northern shore of the southern ocean, and stopped there. When they saw the extent of the ocean, their hearts sank. All of them wailed with one voice: "How can we get beyond this and search for Sita?"

Angada said to them: "Do not despair, O vanaras! He who yields to despondency is robbed of his strength and valour, and he does not reach his goal." Upon hearing this, all the vanaras surrounded Angada, awaiting his plan. He continued: "Who can cross this ocean? Who will fulfil the wish of Sugriva? Surely, it is by the grace of that vanara who is able to cross this ocean that we shall all be able to return home and behold our wives and children: it is by his grace that Rama and Laksmana can experience great joy." No one answered. Angada said again: "Surely, you know that you have immeasurable strength. No one can obstruct your path. Come on, speak up. Let me hear how far each one of you can go."

One by one the mightiest amongst the vanaras answered: "I can go eighty miles." "I can go double that distance." "I can cover treble that distance." And so on till Jambavan's turn came. He said: "In days of yore I had great strength and I could easily have gone across and returned. But on account

of my great age I have grown weak. Once upon a time when lord Visnu assumed the gigantic form (to measure the whole earth with one foot, and the sky with the other) I went round him. But now, alas, I am incapable of crossing this little ocean."

Angada himself declared: "I can surely cross this ocean and go to Lanka. But I am not sure if I can make the return journey. And, if I do not return, my going to Lanka would have been in vain." But Jambavan intervened and said: "Oh, no: you should not undertake this task. When an expedition is organised the commander himself should not participate in it. You are the very root of this whole expedition. And, the wise say that one should always protect the root; for so long as the root is preserved one can always expect to reap the harvest. You are our respected leader, and you should therefore not risk your own life in this venture."

Angada said: "If no one else can cross the ocean and I should not, then we are all doomed to die here. What shall we do?" Jambavan, however, had other ideas: he said: "O prince, there is someone amongst us who can do this."

samstüyamano hanuman vyavardhata mahabalah

samavidhya ca langulam harsacca balameyivan (67.1)

Jambavan said to Hanuman: "What about you, O mighty hero? Why don't you speak up? Your might is equal to that of Sugriva, nay even to that of Rama and Laksmana; and yet you are quiet.

"I shall remind you of your birth and your ancestry. There once was a nymph called Punjikasthala. She was once cursed by a sage as a result of which she was reborn as Anjana, the daugh- ter of a vanara chief called Kunjara. Añjana married Kesari. This nymph who had the body of a human woman was once resting on the top of a hill. It is said that the wind-god, by whom her clothes had been blown up revealing her attractive legs, fell in love with her. Her body was, as it were, embraced by the wind- god. But she was furious and exclaimed: 'Who dares to violate my chastity? The wind-god replied: 'Nay, I shall not violate you, O vanara lady! However, since as wind I have entered your body, you will bear a child who will vie with me in power.'

"Anjana gave birth to you, O Hanuman! When you were a baby, you once saw the sun in the sky. You thought it was a fruit, and jumped up to pluck it from the sky. But, Indra struck you down with his thunderbolt and you fell down. Your left chin was brok- en; and hence you came to be known as hanu-man. It is said that when you were thus injured, the wind-god was angered; there was no movement of wind in the world. The frightened gods propitiated the wind-god; and Brahma the creator then gave you the boon of invincibility in battle. When Indra came to know that you did not die on being hit by the thunderbolt, he conferred a boon on you, that you will die only when you wish to.

"There is no one equal to you in strength or in the ability to cross this ocean, nay, an ocean far wider than this. All others are despondent; the mission surely depends upon you."

When his glory was thus sung and he was reminded of his own power, Hanuman grew in stature, as it were. Seeing him thus filled with enthusiasm, the other vanaras jumped for joy. Hanuman grew in size; and shook his tail in great delight. He said: "Of course I can cross this ocean! With the strength of my arms I can push this ocean away. Stirred by my legs, the ocean will overflow its bounds. I can break up mountains. I can leap into the sky and sail along. I am equal to the wind-god in strength and valour. No one is equal to me other than Garuda of divine origin. I can even lift up the island of Lanka and carry it away."

Greatly inspired by Hanuman's words, the vanaras exclaimed with one voice: "Bravo, O Hanuman. You have saved us all. We shall pray for the success of your mission, standing on one leg till you return." Hanuman ascended the mountain, ready (See note, appendix) leap.

END OF KISKINDHA KANDAM

SUNDARA KANDAM

14th JULY

Beautiful Exploits of Hanuman

sa suryaya mahendraya pavanaya svayambhuve

bhutebhyascañjalim krtva cakára gamane matim (8)

Hanuman was preparing to jump into the ocean and to cross the ocean to go to Lanka. Before undertaking this momentous and vital adventure, he offered prayers to the sun-god, to Indra, to the wind-god, to the Creator and to the elements. He turned to the east and offered his salutations to the wind-god, his own divine parent. He turned his face now to the south, in order to proceed on his great mission.

As he stood there, with his whole being swelling with enthusiasm, fervour and determination, and as he pressed his foot on the mountain before taking off from there, the whole mountain shook. And the shock caused the trees to shed their flowers, birds and beasts to leave their sheltered abodes, subterranean water to gush forth, and even the pleasure-loving celestials and the peace-loving ascetics to leave the mountain resorts, to fly into the sky and watch Hanuman's adventure from there. Giving proof of their scientific skill and knowledge, these celestials and sages remained hovering over the hill, eager to witness Hanuman's departure to Lanka. They said to one another: "This mighty Hanuman who is the god-child of the wind-god himself, will swiftly cross this ocean; for he desires to cross the ocean in order to achieve the mission of Rama and the mission of the vanaras."

Hanuman crouched on the mountain, ready to go. He tensed his body in an effort to muster all the energy that he had. He held his breath in his heart and thus charged himself with even more energy.

He said to the vanaras who surrounded him: "I shall proceed to Lanka with the speed of the missile discharged by Rama. If I do not find Sita there, I shall with the same speed go to the heaven to search for her. And, if I do not

see her even there, I shall get hold of Ravana, bind him and bring him over to the presence of Rama. I shall definitely return with success. If it is difficult to bind Ravana and bring him, I shall uproot Lanka itself and bring it to Rama."

After thus reassuring the vanaras, Hanuman took to the sky. The big trees that stood on the mountain were violently drawn into the slip-stream. Some of these trees flew behind Hanuman: others fell into the ocean; and yet others shed their blossoms on the hill tops, where they lay as a colourful carpet, and on the surface of the ocean where they looked like stars in the blue sky.

Susubhe sa mahateja mahakayo mahakapih

vayumarge niralambe paksavaniva parvatah (78)

The mighty Hanuman was on his way to Lanka. He flew in the southerly direction, with his arms outstretched. One moment it looked as if he would soon drink the ocean; at another as if he desired to drink the blue sky itself. He followed the course of wind, his eyes blazing like fire, like lightning.

Hanuman flying in the air with his tail coiled up behind looked like a meteor with its tail flying from north to the south. His shadow was cast on the surface of the ocean: this made it appear as if there were a big ship on the ocean. As he flew over the surface of the ocean, the wind generated by his motion greatly agitated the ocean. He actually dashed the sur- face of the ocean with his powerful chest. Thus the sea was churned by him as he flew over it. Huge waves arose in his wake with water billowing high into fine spray which looked like clouds. Flying thus in the sky, without any visible support, Hanuman appeared to be a winged mountain.

Hanuman was engaged in the mission of Rama: hence the sun did not scorch him. Rama was a descendant of the solar dynasty. The sages who were present there in their ethereal forms showered their blessings upon him.

Sagara, the deity presiding over the ocean, bethought to himself: "In days of yore, Rama's ancestors, the sons of king Sagara, rendered an invaluable service to me. And it therefore behoves me to render some service to this messenger of Rama who is engaged in the service of Rama. I should see that Hanuman does not tire himself and thus fail in his mission. I should arrange for him to have some rest before he proceeds further."

Thus resolved, Sagara summoned the deity presiding over the mountain named Mainaka which had been submerged in the ocean, and said to Mainaka: "O Mainaka, Indra the chief of gods has established you here in order to prevent the denizens from the sub- terranean regions from coming up. You have the power to extend yourself on all sides. Pray, rise up and offer a seat to Hanuman who is engaged on an important mission on behalf of Rama, so that he can refresh himself before proceeding further."

sa tvah ramahiteyukttam pratyarcayati sagarah

kṛte ca pratikartavyam eṣa dharmah sanatanah (113)

Readily agreeing to this request, the mountain Mainaka rose from the bed of the ocean. As Hanuman flew towards Lanka he saw this mountain actually emerge from the ocean and come into his view. However, he considered that it was an obstacle to his progress towards Lanka, an obstruction on his path, to be quickly overcome. Hanuman actually flew almost touching the peak of the mountain and by the force of the motion, the peak was actually broken.

Assuming a human-form the deity presiding over the Mainaka mountain addressed Hanuman who was still flying: "O Hanuman, pray accept my hospitality. Rest a while on my peak. Refresh your- self. The ocean was extended by the sons of king Sagara, an ancestor of Rama. Hence the deity presiding over the ocean wishes to return the service as a token of gratitude: thus to show one's gratitude is the eternal dharma. With this end in view, the Ocean-god has commanded me to rise to the surface and offer you a resting place. It is our tradition to welcome and to honour guests, even if they are ordinary men; how much more important it is that we should thus honour men like you! There is yet an- other reason why I plead that you should accept my hospitality! In ancient times, all the mountains were endowed with wings. They used to fly around and land where they liked; thus, they terrorised sages and other beings. In answer to their prayer, Indra the chief of gods, wielded his thunderbolt and clipped off the wings of the mountains. As Indra was about to strike me, the wind-god bore me violently away and hid me in the ocean -- so that I escaped Indra's wrath. I owe a debt of gratitude to the wind-god who is your god-father. Pray, allow me to discharge that debt by entertaining you."

Hanuman replied politely: "Indeed, I accept your hospitality, in spirit. Time is passing; and I am on an urgent mission. More- over, I have promised not to rest till my task is accomplished. Hence, forgive my rudeness and discourtesy: I have to be on my way." As a token acceptance of Mainaka's hospitality, Hanuman touched the mountain with his hand and was soon on his way. The gods and the sages who witnessed this scene were greatly im- pressed with Mainaka's gesture of goodwill and Hanuman's unflagging zeal and determination. Indra, highly pleased with the Mainaka mountain, conferred upon it the boon of fearlessness.

pravisto 'smi hi te vaktram katyayani namo 'stu te

gamişye yatra vaidehi satyas ca 'sid varas tava (166)

The gods and the sages overseeing Hanuman's flight to Lanka had witnessed his first feat of strength when he took of from the Mahendra mountain, and his second feat of strength and enthusiasm when he declined even to rest and insisted on the accomplishment of the mission. They were eager to assure them- selves still more conclusively of his ability to fulfil the task he had undertaken.

The gods and the sages now approached Surasa (mother of the Nagas) and said to her: "Here is Hanuman, the god-child of the wind-god, who is flying across the ocean. Pray, obstruct his path just a short while. Assume a terrible demoniacal form, with the body as big as a mountain, with terrible looking teeth and eyes, and mouth as wide as space. We wish to ascertain Hanuman's strength. And we therefore wish to see whether when he is confronted by you, he triumphs over you or becomes despondent."

In obedience to their command, Surasa assumed a terrible form and confronted Hanuman with her mouth wide open. She said to him, as he approached her mouth while flying in the air: "Ah, fate has decreed that you should serve as my food today! Enter my mouth and I shall eat you up."

Hanuman replied: "O lady, I am on an important mission. Rama, the son of king Dasaratha, came to the forest to honour his father's promise. While he was in the forest with his wife, Sita, and his brother, Sita was abducted by Ravana, the ruler of Lanka. I am going to Lanka to find her whereabouts. Do not obstruct my path now. Let me go. If the gods have ordained that I

should enter your mouth, I promise that as soon as I discover Sita and inform Rama of her whereabouts, I shall come back and enter your mouth."

But, Surasa could not be put off. She repeated: "No one can escape me; and it has been decreed that you shall enter my mouth." She opened her mouth wide. Hanuman, by his yogic power, made himself minute, quickly entered her mouth and as quickly got out! He then said to her: "O lady, let me now proceed. I have fulfilled your wish and honoured the gods' decree: I have entered your mouth! Salutations to you! I shall go to where Sita is kept in captivity."

Surasa abandoned her demoniacal form and resumed her own form which was pleasant to look at. She blessed Hanuman: "Go! You will surely find Sita and re-unite her with Rama." The gods and the sages were thrilled to witness this third triumph of Hanuman.

yasya tv etani catvári vanarendra yatha tava

smrtir dhrtir matir daksyam sa karmasu na sidati (198)

Hanuman continued to fly towards Lanka, along the aerial route which contains rain-bearing clouds, along which birds course, where the masters of music move about, and along which aerial cars which resemble lions, elephants, tigers, birds and snakes, fly--the sky which is also the abode of holy men and women with an abundant store of meritorious deeds, which serves as a canopy created by the creator Brahma to protect living beings on earth, and which is adorned with planets, the moon, the sun and the stars.

As he flew onwards, he left behind him a black trail which resembled black clouds, and also trails which were red, yellow and white. He often flew through cloud-formations.

A demoness called Simhika saw Hanuman flying fearlessly in the sky and made up her mind to attack him. She said to herself: "I am hungry. Today I shall swallow this big creature and shall appease my hunger for some time." She caught hold of the shadow cast by Hanuman on the surface of the ocean. Immediately, Hanuman's progress was arrested and he was violently pulled down. He wondered: "How is it that suddenly I am dragged down helplessly?" He looked around and saw the ugly demoness Simhika. He remembered the description which Sugriva had given of her and knew it was Simhika without doubt.

Hanuman stretched his body and the demoness opened her mouth wide. He saw her mouth and her inner vital organs through it. In the twinkling of an eye, he reduced himself to a minute size and dropped into her mouth. He disappeared into that wide mouth. The gods and the sages witnessing this were horrified. But with his adamantine nails he tore open the vital parts of the demoness and quickly emerged from her body. Thus, with the help of good luck, firmness and dexterity Hanuman triumphed over this demoness. The gods applauded this feat and said: "He in whom are found (as in you) these four virtues (firmness, vision, wisdom and dexterity) does not despair in any undertaking.

Hanuman had nearly covered the eight hundred miles, to his destination. At a short distance he saw the shore of Lanka. He saw thick forests. He saw the mountains known as Lamba. And he saw the capital city Lanka built on the mountains. Not wishing to arouse suspicion, he softly landed on the Lamba mountains which were rich in groves of Ketaka Uddalaka and cocoanut trees.

arthan arthantare buddhir niscitamapi na Sobhate

ghatayanti hi karyani dutah panditamaninah (40)

Though Hanuman had crossed the sea, covering a distance of eight hundred miles, he felt not the least fatigue nor exhaustion. Having landed on the mountain range close to the shore of the ocean, Hanuman roamed the forests for some time. In them he saw trees of various kinds, bearing flowers and fruits. He saw the city of Lanka situated on the top of a hill, surrounded by wide moats and guarded by security forces of demons. He approached the northern gate to the city and quietly surveyed it. That gate was guarded by the most ferocious looking demons armed to the teeth with the most powerful weapons. Standing there, he thought of Ravana, the abductor of Sita.

Hanuman thought: "Even if the vanara forces do come here, of what use would that be? For Ravana's Lanka cannot be conquered even by the gods. Only four of us can cross the ocean and come here -- Angada, Nila, Sugriva and myself. And that is totally useless. One cannot negotiate with these demons and win them over by peaceful means. Anyhow, I shall first find out if Sita is alive or not, and only then consider the next step."

In order to find out where Sita was kept in captivity, he had to enter Lanka. The wise Hanuman considered that aspect of his mission. He thought: "Surely, I must be very careful, cautious and vigilant. If I am not, I might ruin the whole mission. An undertaking even after it has been carefully deliberated and decided upon will fail if it is mishandled by an ignorant or inefficient messenger. Therefore I should consider well what should be done and with due regard to all the pros and cons, I should vigilantly ensure that I do nothing which ought not to be done. I should enter the city in such a way that my presence and my movements are not detected; and I see that Ravana's security forces are so very efficient that it will not be easy to escape detection."

Thus resolved, Hanuman reduced himself to a small size, to the size of a cat as it were, and when darkness had fallen, proceeded towards the city. Even from a distance he could see the affluence that the city enjoyed. It had buildings of many storeys. It had archways made of gold. It was brilliantly lit and tastefully decorated. The city was of unimaginable beauty and glory. When Hanuman saw it, he was filled with a mixture of feelings, feelings of despondence, and joy joy at the prospect of seeing Šita, and despondency at the thought of the difficulty involved in it.

Unnoticed by the guards, Hanuman entered the gateway.

yada tvam vanarah kascid vikramad vasamanayet

tada tvaya hi vijñeyam raksasam bhayamagatam (48)

Hanuman was still contemplating the difficulties of the imminent campaign for the recovery of Sita. Conquering Lanka by force seemed to him to be out of the question. He thought: "Possibly only Kumuda, Angada, Susena, Mainda, Dvivida, Su- griva, Kušaparva, Jambavan and myself may be in a position to cross the ocean and come here. However, in spite of the heavy odds against such a campaign, there is the immeasurable prowess of Rama and Laksmana: surely they can destroy the demons with- out any difficulty whatsoever."

As he was entering the city, he was intercepted by Lanka, the guardian of the city. She questioned him: "Who are you, O vanara? This city of Lanka cannot be entered by you!" Hanuman was in no mood to reveal his identity: and he questioned her, in his turn: "Who are you, O lady? And why do you

obstruct my path?" Lanka replied: "At the command of the mighty Ravana, I guard this city. No one can ignore me and enter this city: and you, O vanara, will soon enter into eternal sleep, slain at my hands!"

Hanuman said to her: "I have come as a visitor to this city, to see what is to be seen here. When I have seen what I wish to see, I shall duly return to where I have come from. Pray, let me proceed." But Lanka continued to say: "You can- not enter without overpowering me or winning my permission," and actually hit Hanuman on his chest with her hand.

Hanuman's anger was aroused. Yet, he controlled himself: for he did not consider it right to kill a woman! He clenched his fist and struck Lanka. She fell down, and then revealed: "Compose yourself, O vanara! Do not kill me. The truly strong ones do not violate the code of chivalry, and they do not kill a woman. I am Lanka, and he who has conquered me has conquered Lanka. That was what Brahma the creator once said: 'When a vanara overpowers you, know that then the demons have cause for great fear. I am sure that this prophecy refers to you, O vanara! I realise now that the inevitable destruction of the demons of Lanka has entered the territory in the form of Sita who has been forcibly brought here by Ravana. Go, enter the city: and surely you will find Sita and accomplish all that you desire to accomplish."

dadarsa madhyame gulme raksasasya caran bahun

diksitan jatilan mundan gojinambaravisasah (4.15)

Hanuman did not enter the city through the heavily guarded main gate, but climbed over the wall. Then he came to the main road and proceeded towards his destination -- the abode of Ravana. On the way Hanuman saw the beautiful mansions from which issued the sound of music, and the sound of the citizens' rejoicing. He saw, too, prosperous looking mansions of different designs calculated to bring happiness and greater prosperity to the owners of the mansions. He heard the shouts of wrestling champions. Here and there he heard bards and others singing the glories of Ravana, and he noticed that these bards were surrounded by citizens in large numbers, blocking the road.

Right in the heart of the city, Hanuman saw in the main square numerous spies of Ravana: and these spies looked like holy men, with matted hair, or

with shaven heads, clad in the hides of cows or in nothing at all. In their hands they carried all sorts of weapons, right from a few blades of grass to maces and sticks. They were of different shapes and sizes and of different appearance and complexions. Hanuman also saw the garrison with a hundred thousand soldiers right in front of the inner apartments of Ravana.

Hanuman approached the palace of Ravana himself. This was a truly heavenly abode. Within the compound of the palace and around the building there were numerous horses, chariots, and also aeroplanes. The palace was built of solid and pure gold and the inside was decorated with many precious stones, fragrant with incense and sandalwood which had been sprinkled everywhere: Hanuman entered the palace.

It was nearly midnight. The moon shone brilliantly over- head. From the palace wafted the strains of stringed musical instruments; good-natured women were asleep with their husbands; the violent night-stalkers also emerged from their dwellings to amuse themselves. In some quarters, Hanuman noticed wrestlers training themselves. In some others, women were applying various cosmetic articles to themselves. Some other women were sporting with their husbands. Others whose husbands were away looked unhappy and pale, though they were still beautiful. Hanuman saw all these: but he did not see Sita anywhere.

Not seeing Sita, the beloved wife of Rama, Hanuman felt greatly distressed and unhappy and he became moody and dejected.

jahbünadamayanyeva Sayananyasanani ca

bhajanani ca Subhrani dadarsa hariyuthapah (6.41)

Hanuman was greatly impressed by the beauty and the grandeur of Ravana's palace which he considered to be the crown- ing glory of Lanka itself. He did not all at once enter R&- vana's inner apartments. First he surveyed the palaces of the other members of the royal family and the leaders of the demons, like Prahasta. He surveyed the palaces of Ravana's brothers Kumbhakarna and Vibhisana, as also that of Ravana's son Indra- jit. He was greatly impressed by the unmistakable signs of prosperity that greeted him everywhere. After thus looking at the palaces of all these heroes, Hanuman reached the abode of Ravana himself.

Ravana's own inner apartments were guarded by terrible looking demons, holding the most powerful weapons in their hands. Ravana's own private palace was surrounded by more arm- ed forces; and even these garrisons were embellished by gold and diamonds. Hanuman entered the palace and saw within it palanquins,couches, gardens and art galleries, special chambers for enjoying sexual pleasures and others for indulging in other pastimes during the day. There were also special altars for the the performance of sacred rituals. The whole palace was resplendent on account of the light emitted by precious stones which were found everywhere. Everywhere the couches, the seats and the dining vessels were of gold; and the floor of the whole palace was fragrant with the smell of wine and liquor. In fact Hanuman thought that the palace looked like heaven on earth, resplendent with the wealth of precious gems, and fragrant with the scent of a variety of flowers which covered its dome making it look like a flower-covered hill.

There were swimming pools with lotuses and lilies. In one of them there was the carved figure of a lordly elephant offer- ing worship to Laksmi, the goddess of wealth.

Right in the centre of the palace stood the best of all aeroplanes, known as Puspaka. It had been painted with many colours and provided with numerous precious gems. It was decorated with lovely figures of snakes, birds, and horses fashioned of gems, silver and coral. Every part of that aeroplane had been carefully engineered, only the very best materials had been used, and it had special features which even the vehicles of the gods did not have -- in fact, in it had been brought together only special features! Ravana had acquired it after great austerities and effort.

Hanuman saw all this. But, he did not see Sita anywhere!

rajarsi vipra daityanam gandharvanam ca yoşitah

raksasanam ca yah kanyas tasya kamavasan gatah (68)

Hanuman ascended the aeroplane Puspaka from which he could easily look into the inner apartments of Ravana! As he stood on the aeroplane, he smelt the extraordinary odour emanating from Ravana's dining room, the odour of wines and liquors, the smell of excellent food. The smell was appetising and Hanuman thought the food should be nourishing. And, he saw at the same

time the beautiful hall of Ravana which had crystal floors, with inlaid figures made of ivory, pearls, diamonds, corals, silver and gold. The hall was resplendent with pillars of gems. There was on the floor, a carpet of extraordinary beauty and design. On the walls were murals of several countries' landscapes. This hall thus provided all the five senses with the objects for their utmost gratification! A soft light illumined this hall.

On the carpet beautiful women lay asleep. With their mouths and their eyes closed, they had fallen asleep, after drinking and dancing, and from their bodies issued the sweet fragrance of lotuses. Ravana, sleeping there surrounded by these beautiful women, looked like the moon surrounded by the stars in the night sky. They were all asleep in beautiful disorder. Some were using their own arms as the pillow, others used the different parts of yet others' bodies as their pillow. Their hair was in disarray. Their dress was in disarray, too. But none of these conditions diminished the beauty of their forms. From the breath of all the women there issued the smell of liquor.

These women had come from different grades of society. Some of them were the daughters of royal sages, others those of brahmanas, yet others were the daughters of gandharvas celestial artists), and, of course, some were the daughters of demons: and all of them had voluntarily sought Ravana, for they loved him. Some he had won by his valour; others had become infatuated with him. None of these women had been carried away by Ravana against their wish. None of them had been married before. None of them had desire for another man. Ravana had never before abducted any woman, except Sita.

Hanuman thought for a moment: Ravana would indeed have been a good man if he had thus got Sita too, to be his wife: that is, before she had married Rama and if he had been able to win her by his valour or by his charm. But, Hanuman contemplated further: by abducting the wife of Rama, Ravana had certainly committed a highly unworthy action.

mano hi hetuh sarvesam indriyanam pravartane

SubhaSubhasvavasthasu tacca me suvyavasthitam (11.43)

In the centre of that hall, Hanuman saw the most beautiful and the most luxurious bed: it was celestial in its appearance, built entirely of crystal and decked with gems. The lord of the demons, Ravana himself was asleep on

it. The sight of this demon was at first revolting to Hanuman; so he turned his face away from Ravana. But then he turned his gaze again to Ravana. He saw that the two arms of Ravana were strong and powerful, and they were adorned with resplendent jewelry. His face, his chest, in fact his whole body was strong and radiant. His limbs shone like the lightning.

Around this bed were others on which the consorts of Ravana were asleep. Many of them had obviously been entertaining the demon with their music; and they had fallen asleep with the musical instruments in their arms. On yet another bed was asleep the most charming of all the women in that hall: she sur- passed all the others in beauty, in youth and in adornment. For a moment Hanuman thought it was Sita: and the very thought that he had seen Sita delighted him.

But that thought did not last long. Hanuman realised: "It cannot be. For, separated from Rama, šita will not sleep, nor will she enjoy herself, adorn herself or drink anything. Nor will Sita ever dwell with another man, even if he be a celestial: for truly there is none equal to Rama." He turned away from the hall, since he did not see sita there.

Next, Hanuman searched the dining hall and the kitchen: there he saw varieties of meats and other delicacies, condiments and a variety of drinks. The dining hall floor had been strewn with drinking vessels, fruits and even anklets and armlets which had obviously fallen from their wearers as they were drinking and getting intoxicated.

While he was thus inspecting the palace and searching for sita, a thought flashed in Hanuman's mind: was he guilty of transgressing the bounds of morality, in as much as he was gaz- ing at the wives of others, while they were asleep with their ornaments and clothes in disarray? But, he consoled himself with the thought: "True, I have seen all these women in Ravana's apartment. But, no lustful thought has entered my mind! the mind alone is the cause of good and evil actions performed by the senses; but my mind is devoted to and established in right- eousness. Where else can I look for Sita, except among the womenfolk in Ravana's palace: shall I look for a lost woman among a herd of deer? I have looked for Sita in this place with a pure mind; but she is not to be seen."

namostu ramaya salaksmanaya devyai ca tasyai Janakatmajayai

namostu rudrendra yamanilebhyo namostu candrarkamarud ganebhyah (13.60)

Hanuman had searched the whole palace of Ravana. But he could not find Sita. He reflected: "I shall not yield to despair. For, it has been well said that perseverance alone is the secret of prosperity and great happiness; perseverance alone keeps all things going, and crowns all activities with success. I shall search those places which I have not yet searched." He then be- gan to search for Sita in the other parts of the palace. He saw many, many other women, but not sita.

Hanuman then searched for Sita outside the palace. Yet, he could not find her. Once again dejection gripped him. He thought: "Sita is to be found nowhere; yet Sampati did say that he saw Ravana and he saw Sita, too. Perhaps it was mistaken identity. It may be that slipping from the control of Ravana, Sita dropped her body into the sea. Or, it may be she died of shock. Or, per- haps when she did not yield to him, Ravana killed her and ate her flesh. But it is impossible that she had consented to be Ravana's consort. Whether she is lost, or she has perished or has died, how can I inform Rama about it? On the other hand, to inform Rama and not to inform Rama -- both these appear to be objectionable. What shall I do now?" He also reflected on the consequence of his returning to Kişkindha with no news of Sita. He felt certain that: "When Rama hears the bad news from me, he will give up his life. So will Laksmana. And then their brothers and mothers in Ayodhya. Nor could Sugriva live after Rama departs from this world. He will be followed to the other world by all the vanaras of Kişkindha. What a terrible calamity will strike Ayodhya and Kişkindha if I return without news of Sita's safety!" He resolved: "It is good that I should not return to Kişkindha. Like an ascetic I shall live under a tree here. Or, I can commit suicide by jumping into the sea. However, the wise ones say that suicide is the root of many evils, and that if one lives one is sure to find what one seeks."

The consciousness of his extraordinary strength suddenly seized Hanuman! He sprang up and said to himself: "I shall at once kill this demon Ravana. Even if I cannot find Sita, I shall have avenged her abduction by killing her abductor. Or, I shall kidnap him and take him to Rama." Then he thought of a few places in Lanka he had not yet searched; one of them was Asoka-grove. He resolved to go there. Before doing so, he offered a prayer: "Salutations to Rama and Laksmana; salutations to Sita, the daughter of

Janaka. Salutations to Rudra, Indra, Yama, the wind-god, to the moon, fire, and the Maruts." He turned round in all directions and invoked the blessings of all. He knew he needed them for he felt that demons of superhuman strength were guarding the Asoka-grove.

duhkhena bubudhe sitam hanuman analankṛtam

samskarena yatha hinam vacam arthantaram gatam (15.39)

Hanuman then climbed the palace wall and jumped into the Ašoka-grove. It was most beautiful and enchanting, with trees and creepers of innumerable types.

In that grove, Hanuman also saw the bird sanctuary, the ponds and artificial swimming pools hemmed by flights of steps which had been paved with expensive precious and semi-precious stones. He also saw a hill with a waterfall flowing from its side. Not far from there, he saw a unique Asoka or Simsapa tree which was golden in its appearance. The area around this tree was covered with trees which had golden leaves and blossoms, giving the appearance that they were ablaze.

Climbing up that unique Simsapa tree, Hanuman felt certain that he would soon see Sita. He reasoned: "Sita was fond of the forests and groves, according to Rama. Hence, she will doubtless come to this yonder lotus-pond. Rama did say that she was fond of roaming the forest: surely, then, she would wish to roam this grove, too. It is almost certain that the grief-stricken Sita would come here to offer her evening prayers. If she is still alive, I shall surely see her today."

Seated on that Ašoka or Simsapa tree, Hanuman surveyed the whole of the grove. He was enthralled by the beauty of the grove, of the trees, and of the blossoms which were so colourful that it appeared as if the whole place were afire. There were numerous other trees, too, all of which were delightful to look at. While he was thus surveying the scene, he saw a magnificent temple, not far from him. This temple had a hall of a thousand pillars, and looked like the Kailasa. The temple had been painted white. It had steps carved out of coral. And its platforms were all made of pure gold.

And, then, Hanuman saw a radiant woman with an ascetic appearance. She was surrounded by demonesses who were apparently guarding her. She was radiant though her garments were soiled. She was beautiful in form, though

emaciated through sorrow, hunger and austerity. Hanuman felt certain that it was Sita, and that it was the same lady whom he had momentarily seen over the Rsyamuka hill. She was seated on the ground. And, she was frequently sighing, surely on account of her separation from Rama. With great difficulty, Hanuman recognised her as Sita: and in this he was helped only by the graphic and vivid description that Rama had given him.

Looking at her, thus pining for Rama, and recollecting Rama's love for her, Hanuman marvelled at the patience of Rama in that he could live without sita even for a short while.

manya guruvinitasya laksmanasya gurupriya

yadi sitapi duhkharta kalo hi duratikramah (16.3)

Hanuman contemplated the divine form of Sita for a few minutes; and he once again gave way to dejection. He reflected: "If even Sita who is highly esteemed by the noble and humble Laksmana, and who is the beloved of Rama himself, could be subjected to such sorrow, indeed one should conclude that Time is all-powerful. Surely, Sita is utterly confident in the ability of Rama and Laksmana to rescue her; and hence she is tranquil even in this misfortune. Only Rama deserves to be her husband, and she to be Rama's consort." How great was Rama's love for Sita! And, what an extraordinary person Sita was! Han- uman continued to weigh her in his own mind's balance: "It was for the sake of Sita that thousands of demons in the Dandaka forest were killed by Rama. It was for her sake alone that Rama killed Vali and Kabandha. Khara, Düsana, Trisira -- so many of these demons met their end because of her. And, why not: she is such a special person that if, for her sake, Rama turned the whole world upside down it would be proper. For, she was of extraordinary birth, she is of extraordinary beauty and she is of extraordinary character. She is unexcelled in every way. And, what an extraordinary love she has for Rama, in that she patiently endures all sorts of hardships living, as she does, as a captive in Lanka. Again, Rama pines for her and is eagerly waiting to see her, to regain her. Here she is, constantly thinking of Rama: she does not see either these demonesses guarding her, nor the trees, flowers or fruits, but with her heart centred in Rama, she sees him alone constantly." He was now certain that that lady was in fact sita.

The moon had risen. The sky was clear and the moonlight enabled Hanuman to see Sita clearly. He saw the demonesses guarding Sita. They were hideous-looking and deformed in various parts of their bodies. Their lips, breasts and bellies were disproportionately large and hanging. Some were very tall; others were very short. They were mostly dark-complexioned. Some of them had ears, etc., that made them look like animals. They were querulous, noisy, and fond of flesh and liquor. They had smeared their bodies with meat and blood; and they ate meat and blood. Their very sight was revolting and frightening. There in their midst was Sita.

Sita's dress and her appearance reflected her grief. At the foot of the tree whose name, Asoka, meant free of sorrow, was seated Sita immersed in an ocean of sorrow, surrounded by these terrible demonesses! It was only her confidence in the prowess and the valour of her lord Rama that sustained her life. Hanuman mentally prostrated to Rama, to Laksmana and to Sita, and hid himself among the branches of the tree."

sannam iva mahakirtim sraddham iva vimanitam

prajñam iva pariksinam asam pratihatam iva (19.11)

Night was drawing to a close. In his palace, Ravana was being awakened by the Vedic recitation of brahmana-demons who were well versed in the Vedas and other scriptural texts, and also by musicians and bards who sang his praises. Even before he had time to adorn himself properly, Ravana thought of Sita and longed intensely to see her. Quickly adorning himself with the best of ornaments and clad in splendid garments, he entered the Asoka-grove, accompanied by a hundred chosen women who carried golden torches, fans, cushions and other articles. They were still under the influence of alcohol: and Ravana, though mighty and powerful, was under the influence of passion for Sita.

Hanuman recognised the person he had seen asleep in the palace the previous night.

Seeing him coming in her direction, the frightened Sita shielded her torso with her legs and hands, and began to weep bitterly. Pining for Rama, distressed on account of her separation from him and stricken with grief, the most beautiful and radiant Sita resembled eclipsed fame, neglected faith, enfeebled understanding, forlorn hope, ruined prospect, dis- regarded

command, and obstructed worship; eclipsed moon, deci-mated army, fuelless flame, river in drought. She was constantly engaged in the prayer that Rama might soon triumph over Ravana and rescue her.

Ravana appeared to be chivalrous in his approach to Sita, and his words were meaningful and sweet: he said to Sita, "Pray, do not be afraid of me, Ŏ charming lady! It is natural for a demon to enjoy others' wives and abduct them forcibly; it is the demon's own dharma. But, I shall not violate you against your wishes. For, I want to win your love; I want to win your esteem. I have enough strength to restrain myself. Yet, it breaks my heart to see you suffer like this; to see you, a princess, dressed like this in tattered and dirty garments. You are born to apply the most delightful cosmetic articles, to wear royal attire, and to adorn yourself with the most expensive jewels. You are young, youthful: this is the time to enjoy yourself, for youth is passing. There is none in the three worlds who is as beautiful as you are, O princess: for, having fashioned you, the Creator has retired. You are so beautiful that no one in the three worlds--not even Brahma the creator -- could but be overcome by passion. When you accept me, all that I have will become yours. Even my chief wives will become your servants. Let me warn you: no one in the three worlds is my match in strength and valour. Rama, even if he is alive, does not even know where you are: he has no hope of regaining you. Give up this foolish idea of yours. Let me behold you appropriately dressed and adorned. And, let us enjoy life to your heart's content.

akamam kamayanasya Sariram upatapyate

icchantim kamayanasya pritir bhavati Sobhana (22.42)

Ravana's words were extremely painful to the grief-strick- en sita. She placed a blade of grass in front of her, unwilling even to speak to Ravana directly, and said: "You cannot aspire for me any more than a sinful man can aspire for perfection! I will not do what is unworthy in the eyes of a chaste wife. Surely, you do not know dharma, nor do you obviously listen to the advice of wise counsellors. Set an example to your subjects, O demon: and consort with your own wives; desire for others' wives will lead to infamy. The world rejoices at the death of a wicked man: even so it will, soon, on your death. But do not desire for me. You cannot win me by offering me power or wealth: for I am inseparable from Rama even as 1ight from the sun. He is the abode of righteousness, of dharma; take me back to

him and beg his pardon. He loves those who seek his refuge. If you do not, you will surely come to grief: for no power on earth can save you from Rama's weapon. His missiles will surely de- stroy the entire Lanka. In fact, if you had not stolen me in the absence of Rama and Laksmana, you would not be alive today: you could not face them, you coward!"

Ravana's anger was roused, and he replied: "Normally,women respond to a pleasant approach by a man. But you seem to be different, O sita. You rouse my anger; but my desire for you subdues that anger. My love for you prevents me from killing you straight away; though you deserve to be executed, for all the insulting and impudent words you utter. Well, I had fixed one year as the time-limit for you to make up your mind. Ten months have elapsed since then. You have two more months in which to decide to accede to my wish. If you fail to do so, my cooks will prepare a nice meal of your flesh for me to eat."

But, sita remained unmoved. She said to Ravana: "You are prattling, O wicked demon: I can by my own spiritual energy reduce you to ashes: but I do not do so on account of the fact that I have not been so ordered by Rama and I do not want to waste my own spiritual powers."

The terrible demon was greatly enraged by these words of sita. He threatened her: "Wait, I shall destroy you just now." But he did not do so. However, he said to the demonesses guard- ing Sita: "Use all your powers to persuade Sita to consent to my proposal." Immediately, Ravana's consorts embraced him and pleaded: "Why don't you enjoy our company, giving up your desire for sita? For, a man who seeks the company of one who has no love for him comes to grief, and he who seeks the company of one who loves him enjoys life." Hearing this and laughing aloud, Ravana walked away.

alam aruprapatena tyaja Sokamanarthakam

bhaja pritim praharşam ca tyajaitam nitya dainyatam (24.33)

After Ravana had left the grove, the demonesses said: "How is it that you do not value Ravana's hand? Perhaps you do not know who he is. Of the six Prajapatis who were the sons of the creator himself, Pulastya is the fourth; of Pulastya was the sage Visrava born, and he was equal to Pulastya himself in glory. And this Ravana is the son of Visrava. He is known as Ravana

because he makes his enemies cry. It is a great honour to ac- cept his proposal. Moreover, this Ravana worsted in battle the thirty-three deities presiding over the universe. Hence he is superior even to the gods. And, what is most important: he sure- ly loves you so much that he is prepared to abandon his own favourite wives and give you all his love."

Sita was deeply pained by these words uttered by the demon esses. She said: "Enough of this vulgar and sinful advice. A human being should not become the wife of a demon. But, even that is irrelevant. I shall not under any circumstance abandon my husband and seek another." The demonesses were enraged and began to threaten Sita. And, Hanuman was witnessing all this.

The demonesses said again: "You have shown enough affect- ion to the unworthy Rama. Excess of anything is undesirable and leads to undesirable result. You have so far conformed to the human rules of conduct. It is high time that you abandoned that code, abandoned the human Rama and consented to be Ravana's wife We have so far put up with the rude and harsh words you have uttered; and we have so far offered you loving and wholesome advice, intent as we are on your welfare. But you seem to be too stupid to see the truth. You have been brought here by Ravana; you have crossed the ocean. Others cannot cross the ocean and come to your rescue. We tell you this, O Sita: even Indra cannot rescue you from here. Therefore, please do as we tell you, in your interest. Enough of your weeping. Give up this sorrow which is destructive. Abandon this wretched life. At- tain love and pleasure. Make haste, O Sita: for youth, especially of women, is but momentary and passes quickly. Make up your mind to become Ravana's wife. If, however, you are obstinate, we shall ourselves tear your body and eat your heart."

Other demonesses took up the cue and began to threaten sita. They said: "When I first saw this lovely woman brought into Lanka by Ravana the desire arose in me that I should eat her liver and spleen, her breasts and her heart. I am waiting for that day....What is the delay? Let us report to the king that she died and he will surely ask us to eat her flesh!..... We should divide her flesh equally and eat it, there should be no quarrel amongst us.....After the meal, we shall dance in front of the goddess Bhadrakali."

loka pravadah satyoyam panḍitaih samudahṛtah

akale durlabho mṛtyuh striya va purusasya va (25.12)

In utter despair, Sita gave vent to her grief by thinking aloud: "The wise ones have rightly said that untimely death is not attained here either by man or a woman. Hence though I am suffering intolerable anguish on account of my separation from my beloved husband, I am unable to give up my life. This grief is slowly eating me. I can neither live nor can I die. Surely, this is the bitter fruit of some dreadful sin committed in a past birth. I am surrounded by these demonesses: and how can Rama reach me here? Fie upon human birth, and fie upon the state of dependence upon others, as a result of which I cannot even give up my life.

"What a terrible misfortune it was that even though I was living under the protection of Rama and Laksmana, I was abducted by Ravana, in their absence. Even more terrible it is that having been separated from my beloved husband I am confined here surrounded by these terrible demonesses. And, the worst part of it is: in spite of all these misfortunes, my heart does not burst with anguish thus letting me die. Of course, I shall never allow Ravana to touch me, so long as I am alive.

"I wonder why Rama has not taken steps to come to my aid. For my sake he killed thousands of demons while we were in the forest. True I am on an island; but Rama's missiles have no difficulty crossing oceans and finding their target. Surely, he does not know where I am. Alas, even Jatayu who could have informed Rama of what had happened was killed by Ravana. If only he knew I was here, Rama would have destroyed Lanka and dried up the ocean with his missiles. All the demonesses of Lanka would weep then, as I am weeping now; all the demons would be killed by Rama. Lanka would be one huge crematorium.

"I see all sorts of evil portents. I shall be re-united with Rama. He will come. He will destroy all these demons. If only Rama comes to know where I am, Lanka will be turned desolate by him, burnt by his terrible missiles. On the other hand, the time is fast running out: the time limit that Ravana had fixed for me to decide. Two more months: and I shall be cut into pieces for Ravana's meal. May it be that Rama himself is no more, having succumbed to grief on account of my separation? Or, may it be that he has turned an ascetic? Usually, people who love each other forget each other when they are separated; but not so Rama whose love is eternal. Blessed indeed are the

holy sages who have reached enlightenment and to whom the pleasant and the unpleasant are non-different. I salute the holy ones. And, fallen into this terrible misfortune, I shall presently give up my life."

tatah sa hrimati bala bhartur vijaya harsita

avocad yadi tat tathyam bhaveyam šaranam hi vah (53)

Hearing the words of Sita, some of the demonesses grew terribly angry. They threatened: "We shall go and report all this to Ravana; and then we shall be able to eat you at once." Another demoness named Trijata just then woke up from her slumber and announced: "Forget all this talk about eating Sita, O foolish ones! I have just now dreamt a dream which forewarns that a terrible calamity awaits all of you." The demonesses asked: "Tell us what the dream was."

Trijata narrated her dream in great detail: "I saw in my dream Rama and Laksmana, riding a white space vehicle. Sita was sitting on a white mountain, clad in shining white robes. Rama and Sita were re-united. Rama and Laksmana then got on a huge elephant which Sita, too, mounted. Sita held out her arms and her hands touched the sun and the moon. Rama, Laksmana and Sita later mounted the Puspaka space vehicle and flew away in a northerly direction. From all these I conclude that Rama is divine and invincible.

"Listen to me further. In another dream I saw Ravana. His head had been shaven. He was covered with oil. He wore crimson clothes. He was drunk. He had fallen from the Puspaka space vehicle. Later, I saw him dressed in black but smeared in a red pigment and dragged by a woman riding a vehicle drawn by don- keys. He fell down from the donkey. He was prattling like a mad man. Then he entered a place which was terribly dark and foul-smelling. Later a dark woman with body covered in mud, bound Ravana's neck and dragged him away in a southerly direct- ion. I saw Kumbhakarna as also the sons of Ravana in that dream; all of them undergoing the same or similar treatment. Only Vibhisana's luck was different. He was clad in white garment, with white garlands, and had a royal white umbrella held over his head.

"I also saw in that dream that the whole of Lanka had been pushed into the sea, utterly destroyed and ruined. I also saw a rather strange dream. I saw

Lanka burning furiously: though Lanka is protected by Ravana who is mighty and powerful, a vanara was able to set Lanka ablaze, because the vanara was a servant of Rama.

"I see a clear warning in these dreams, O foolish women! Enough of your cruelty to Sita; I think it is better to please her and win her favour. I am convinced that Sita will surely achieve her purpose and her desire to be re-united with Rama.

Hearing this, Sita felt happy and said: "If this comes true, I shall certainly protect all of you.

bhutas ca 'rtha vinasyanti desa kala virodhitah

viklavam dutam asadya tamah suryodaye yatha (30.37)

But, the demonesses did not pay heed to Trijata. And, Sita thought:

"Truly have the wise ones declared that death never comes to a person before the appointed time. My time has come. Ravana has said definitely that if I do not agree to him I will be put to death. Since I can never, never love him, it is certain that I shall be executed. Hence, I am condemned already. I shall, therefore, incur no blame if I voluntarily end my life today. O Rama! O Laksmana! O Sumitra! O Kausalya! O Mother! Caught helplessly and brought to this dreadful place, I am about to perish. Surely it was my own 'bad-time' that approached me in the form of that golden deer, and I, a foolish woman sent the two princes in search of it. Maybe, they were killed by some demon. Or, maybe they are alive and do not know where I am.

"Alas, whatever virtue I practised and the devotion with which I served my own lord and husband, all these have come to naught; I shall presently abandon this ill-fated life of mine. O Rama, after you complete the fourteen-year term of exile, you will return to Ayodhya and enjoy life with the queens you might marry. But, I who loved you and whose heart is forever fastened to you, shall soon be no more.

"How shall I end this life? I have no weapon; nor will any- one here give me a weapon or poison to end my life. Ah, I shall use this string with which my hair has been tied and hang myself from this tree."

Thinking aloud in this manner, Sita contemplated the feet of Rama and got ready to execute herself. At the same time, how- ever, she noticed many auspicious omens which dissuaded her from her wish to end her life. Her left eye, left arm and left thigh throbbed. Her heart was gladdened, her sorrow left her for the moment, her despair abated, and she became calm and radiant once again.

Hanuman, sitting on the tree, watched all this. He thought: "If I meet Sita in the midst of these demonesses, it would be disastrous. In fact, she might get frightened and cry and before I could make the announcement concerning Rama, I might be caught. I can fight all the demons here; but then I might be too weak to fly back. I could speak to her in the dialect of of the brahmana; but she might suspect a vanara speaking sanskrit to be Ravana himself! To speak to Sita now seems to be risky; yet, if I do not, she might commit suicide. If one does not act with due regard to place and time, the contrary results ensue. I shall sing the glories of Rama softly and thus win Sita's confidence. Then I shall deliver Rama's message to her in a manner which will evoke her confidence."

nisamya sita vacanam kapes ca disas ca sarvah pradišas ca viksya

svayam praharsam paramam jagama sarvatmana ramam anusmaranti (31.18)

After deep deliberation, Hanuman decided upon the safest and the wisest course! Softly, sweetly, clearly and in cultured accents, he narrated the story of Rama. He said: "A descendant of the noble Iksvaku was the emperor Dasaratha, who was a royal sage in as much as he was devoted to asceticism and righteousness, while yet ruling his kingdom. His eldest son Rama was equally powerful, glorious and righteous. To honour his father's promise to his step-mother, Rama went to the Dandaka forest along with his brother Laksmana, and his wife Sita. There, Rama killed thousands of demons. A demon disguised as a deer tricked Rama and Laksmana away, and at that time, the wicked Ravana ab- ducted Sita. Rama went searching for her; and while so wander- ing the forest cultivated the friendship of the vanara Sugriva. Sugriva commissioned millions of vanaras to search for Sita. Endowed with extraordinary energy, I crossed the ocean; and blessed I am that I am able to behold that Sita."

Sita was supremely delighted to hear that speech. She looked up and down, around and everywhere, and saw the vanara Hanuman. But, seeing the vanara seated on the tree, Sita was frightened and suspicious. She cried aloud; "O Rama, O Laks- mana." She was terror-stricken as the vanara approached her; but she was pleasantly surprised to see that he came humbly and worshipfully. She thought: "Am I dreaming? I hope not; it forebodes ill to dream of a vanara. Nay, I am not dreaming. Maybe, this is hallucination. I have constantly been thinking of Rama, I have constantly uttered his name, and talked about him. Since my whole being is absorbed in him, I am imagining all this. But, I have reasoned out all this carefully within myself; yet, this being here is not only clearly seen by me, but it talks to me, too! I pray to the gods, may what I have just heard be true."

With his palms joined together in salutation over his head, Hanuman humbly approached Sita and asked: "Who are you, O lady? Are you indeed the wife of that blessed Rama?"

Highly pleased with this question, Sita thereupon related her whole story: "I am the daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha, and the daughter of king Janaka. I am the wife of Rama. We lived happily in Ayodhya for twelve years. But when Rama was about to be crowned, his step-mother Kaikeyi demanded the boon from her husband that Rama should be banished to the forest. The king swooned on hearing this; but Rama took it upon himself to fulfil that promise. I followed him; and Laksmana, too, came with us. One day when they were away, Ravana forcibly carried and brought me here. He has given me two more months to live; after which I shall meet my end."

kalyani bata gathe 'yam laukiki pratibhati me

eti jivantam anando naram varsa satad api (34.6)

Once again bowing down to Sita, Hanuman said to her: "O di- vine lady, I am a messenger sent by Rama. He, as also his brother Laksmana, send their greetings and hope that you are alive and weli." Sita rejoiced and thought to herself: "Surely, there is a lot of truth in the old adage: 'Happiness is bound to come to the man who lives, even though after a long time. But, as Hanuman came near her, she grew suspicious and would not even look at him: she thought, and said to him: "O Ravana! Previously you assumed the disguise of a mendicant and abducted me. Now, you have come to torment me in the guise of a vanara! Pray, leave me alone." But, on the other hand,

she reasoned to her- self: "No this cannot be; for on seeing this vanara, my heart rejoices."

Hanuman, however, reassured her: "O blessed Sita, I am a messenger sent by Rama who will very soon kill these demons and rescue you from their captivity. Rama and Laksmana constantly think of you. So does king Sugriva whose minister Hanuman, I am. Endowed with extraordinary energy I crossed the sea. I am not what you suspect me to be!"

At her request, Hanuman recounted the glories of Rama: "Rama is equal to the gods in beauty, charm and wisdom. He is the protector of all living beings, of his own people, of his work and of his dharma; he is the protector of people of different occupations, of good conduct, and he himself adheres to good conduct and makes others do so, too. He is mighty, friendly, well-versed in scriptures and devoted to the holy He is endowed with all the characteristics of the best among men, which are: broad shoulders, strong arms, powerful neck, lovely face, reddish eyes, deep voice, dark-brown coloured skin; he has firm chest, wrist and fist; he has long eyebrows, arms and scrotum; he has symmetrical locks, testicles and knees; he has strong bulging chest, abdomen and rim of the navel; reddish in the corner of his eyes, nails, palms and soles; he is soft in his glans, the lines of his feet and hair; he has deep voice, gait and navel; three folds adorn the skin of his neck and his abdomen; the arch of his feet, the lines on his soles, and the nipples are deep; he has short generative organ, neck, back and shanks; three spirals adorn the hair on his head; there are four lines at the root of his thumb; and four lines on his forehead; he is four cubits tall; the four pairs of his limbs (cheeks, arms, shanks and knees) are symmetrical; even so the other fourteen pairs of limbs; his limbs are long. He is excellent in every way. Laksmana, Rama's brother, is also full of charm and excellences."

prapsyamy aham idam diṣṭya tvat darsanakṛtam yasah

raghavas ca mahaviryah ksipram tvam abhipatsyate (35.79)

Hanuman then narrated in great detail all that had happened. He mentioned in particular how Rama was moved to tears when Hanuman showed him the pieces of jewelry that Sita had dropped on the hill. He concluded that narrative by affirming: "I shall certainly attain the glory of having seen you first; and Rama too will soon come here to take you back." He also revealed to Sita his own identity: "Kesari, my father, lived on the mountain known

as Malayavan. Once he went to the Gokarna mountain at the command of the sages to fight and to kill a démon named Sambas- adana who tormented the people. I was born of the wind-god and my mother Anjana. I tell you again, O divine lady, that I am a vanara, and I am a messenger sent by Rama; here, behold the ring which has been inscribed with the name of Rama. Whatever might have been the cause of your suffering captivity, it has almost come to an end."

When she saw the signet ring, Sita felt the presence of Rama himself; she was filled with joy. Her attitude to Hanuman, too, immediately and dramatically changed. She exclaimed: "You are heroic, capable, and wise, too, O best among vanaras. What a remarkable feat you have accomplished by crossing this vast ocean, a distance of eight hundred miles. Surely, you are not an ordinary vanara in that you are not afraid of even Ravana. I am delighted to hear that Rama and Laksmana are well. But why has he not rescued me yet: he could dry up the ocean, in fact he could even destroy the whole earth with his missiles if he wanted to. Perhaps, they had to wait for the propitious moment, and that moment which would mean the end of my suffering has not yet arrived.

"O Hanuman, tell me more about Rama. Does he continue to rely on both self-effort and divine agency in all that he under- takes? Tell me, O Hanuman, does he still love me as before? And, I also hope that, pining for me, he does not waste away. And also tell me: how will Rama rescue me from here. Will Bharata send an army? When he renounced the throne and when he took me to the forest, he displayed extraordinary firmness: is he still as firm in his resolves? Oh, I know that he loves me more than anyone else in this world."

Hanuman replied: "You will soon behold Rama, O Sita! Stricken with grief on account of his separation from you, Rama does not eat meat, nor drink wine; he does not even wish to ward off flies and mosquitoes that assail him. He thinks of you constantly. He hardly sleeps; and if he does, he wakes up calling out 'Ah Sita'. When he sees a fruit or flower, he thinks of you." Hearing the glories of Rama, Sita was rid of sorrow; hearing of his grief, Sita grew equally sorrowful.

aisvarye va suvistirne vyasane va sudarune

rajjv eva purusam baddhva kṛtantah parikarsati (3)

Sita replied to Hanuman: "Your description of Rama's love for me comes to me like nectar mixed with poison. In whatever condition one may be, whether one is enjoying unlimited power and prosperity or one is in dreadful misery, the end of one's action drags a man as if he were tied with a rope. Look at the way in which Rama, Laksmana and I have been subjected to sorrow: surely, no one can overcome destiny. I wonder when the time will come when I shall be united with Rama once again. Ravana gave me one year, of which ten months have passed and only two are left. At the end of those two months, Ravana will surely kill me. There is no alternative. For, he does not fancy the thought of taking me back to Rama. In fact, such a course was suggested by Ravana's own brother Vibhisana: so his own daughter Kala told me. But Ravana turns a deaf ear upon such wise counsel."

Hanuman said to Sita: "I am sure that Rama will soon arrive here, with an army of forest-dwellers and other tribes, as soon as I inform him of your whereabouts. But, O divine lady, I have another idea. You can rejoin your husband this very day. I can enable you to end this sorrow instantly. Pray, do not hesitate; get on my back, and seek union (yogam) with Rama now. I have the power to carry you, or even Lanka, Ravana and everything in it! No one will be able to pursue me or to overcome me. What a great triumph it will be if I return to Kiskindha with you on my back!"

For a moment Sita was thrilled at this prospect. But she remarked almost in jest: "You are speaking truly like a vanara, an ignorant tribesman. You are so small: and you think you can carry me over the ocean!" Hanuman, thereupon, showed Sita his real form. Seeing him stand like a mountain in front of her, Sita felt sure that his confidence was justified, but said to him: "O mighty Hanuman, I am convinced that you can do as you say. But I do not think it is proper for me to go with you. You may proceed at great speed; but I may slip and fall into the ocean. If I go with you, the demons will suspect our relationship and give it an immoral twist. Moreover, many demons will pursue you: how will you, unarmed as you are, deal with them and at the same time protect me? I might once again fall into their hands. I agree you have the power to fight them: but if you kill them all, it will rob Rama of the glory of killing them and rescuing me. Surely, when Rama and Laksmana come here with you, they will destroy the demons and liberate me. I am devoted to Rama; and I will not of my own accord touch the body

of another man. Therefore, Therefore, O Hanuman, enable Rama and Laksmana to come here with greatest expedition."

tvam asmin karya niryoge pramanam harisattama

raghavas tvat samarambhan mayi yatnaparo bhavet (66)

Hanuman, the wise vanara, was highly impressed and thoroughly convinced of the propriety of Sita's arguments. He applauded them, and prayed: "If you feel you should not come, pray, give me a token which I might take back with me and which Rama might recognise."

This suggestion revived old memories and moved Sita to tears. She said to Hanuman: "I shall give you the best token. Please remind my glorious husband of a delightful episode in our forest-life which only he and I know. This happened when we were living near Citrakoota hill. We had finished our bath; and we had had a lot of fun playing in water. Rama was sitting on my lap. A crow began to worry me. I kept it away threatening it with stones. It hid itself. When I was getting dressed and when my skirt slipped a little, the crow attacked me again: but I defended myself angrily. Looking at this Rama laughed, while sweetly pacifying me.

"Both of us were tired. I slept on Rama's lap for sometime. Later Rama slept with his head resting on my lap. The crow (who was Indra's son in disguise) attacked me again and began to inflict wounds on my body. A few drops of blood trickled from my chest and fell on Rama who awoke. Seeing the vicious crow perched on a nearby tree, Rama picked up the missile named after the creator and hurled it at the crow. That crow flew round to the three worlds but found no asylum anywhere else.

"Eventually it sought refuge with Rama himself. Rama was instantly pacified. Yet, the missile could not be neutralised. The crow sacrificed its right eye and saved its life." As she was narrating the story, Sita felt the presence of Rama and addressed him: "O Rama, you were ready to use the Brahma-missile towards a mere crow for my sake; why do you suffer my abduction with patience? Though I have you as my lord and master, yet I live here like a destitute! Have you no compassion for me: it was from you I learnt that compassion is the greatest virtue!" She said to Hanuman again: "No power on earth can con- front Rama. It is only my ill-luck that prevents them from coming to my rescue."

Hanuman explained: "It was only ignorance of your whereabouts that has caused this delay, O divine lady. Now that we know where you are, the destruction of the demons is at hand." Sita said: "The fulfilment of this mission depends upon you; with your aid, Rama will surely succeed in his mission. But, please tell Rama that I shall be alive only for a month more." Then as a further token, Sita took off a precious jewel from her person and gave it to Hanuman. Receiving that jewel, and with Sita's blessings, Hanuman was ready to depart.

asakṛt tair mahotsahaih sasagara dharadhara

pradaksinikṛta bhumir vayu marga 'nusaribhih (39.37)

Once again Sita reminded Hanuman: "I had kept with me this jewel which was to me the very presence of Rama. Whenever I looked at it, it was as if Rama were with me. It will remind Rama of me, of my mother and of king Dasaratha. Pray, tell Rama all that you have seen here, how I live, how I pine for him and how I remain alive only in the hope of seeing him again. Say all this in such a way that Rama will rescue me alive; and thus shall you have earned the merit of using the power of speech aright. What, when and how Rama does now depends entirely upon what and how you say to him when you meet him. Hanuman reassured her.

But, fear and doubt haunted Sita who said: "I am haunted by a doubt, O Hanuman. How will the hordes of the hill-tribes cross the ocean and come here? Of course it will be glorious if Rama kills Ravana and his demon followers and returns with me to Ayodhya. But, how do you think this can be achieved?"

To reassure her, Hanuman said: "It is easy for us vanaras, O divine lady. The vanaras are very powerful. They have often gone round the world along the aerial routes. Sugriva's army consists of vanaras equal to me and far superior to me: in fact none in that army is inferior to me in power. Surely, it is obvious that no wise leader will send a superior hero as a messenger; only inferior ones are sent as messengers. Have no misgivings, O Sita. I shall myself carry Rama and Laksmana on my back and bring them here. The rest of the work is easy:"

Once again Sita said to Hanuman as he was about to depart: "Pray, give that jewel to Rama; it is something I have cherished and considered a most

precious memento. Also remind him: once when the auspicious mark on my forehead had got wiped out, he himself applied it once again and laughed. Remind him of the story of the crow which I have already narrated to you. And, please do not forget to tell him that I can keep myself alive here -- and that, too, only for his sake -- only for a month more."

And, once again, Hanuman said to Sita: "I swear that even as you are constantly thinking of him, Rama, too is constantly thinking of you, O Sita. And there will be no delay at all in his arrival here."

Sita felt unhappy when Hanuman got ready to leave and put in the last word: "You have the best tokens of my love for Rama. Pray, tell him everything in detail. Ensure that Rama is able to end my agony in the shortest possible time."

jayaty atibalo ramo laksmanas ca mahabalah

raja jayati sugrivo raghavena 'bhipalitah (42.33)

Hanuman took leave of Sita, but did not leave Lanka. He thought: "The time has come for a showdown of military strength. With the demons you cannot negotiate; you cannot win wealthy and prosperous enemies with tempting baits of gifts; nor can you sow seeds of discord among the powerful: hence a show of strength alone seems to be appropriate. Before leaving Lanka I should give these demons a foretaste of our strength; only then will these demons adopt a respectable attitude when we face them in battle. Moreover, success comes to one only if one utilises the opportunity afforded by an expedition to accomplish not only the principal objective, but several secondary ones. Surely, there are many paths to success in a venture; and one who knows many ways of reaching his goal is assured of success. I see that this is Ravana's own pleasure-grove, and it is rich and beautiful. I shall destroy it. This will surely provoke Ravana who might come here with his army. And that would give me an opportunity to estimate his strength and to give him an indica- tion of what he could expect from us."

With devasting suddenness, Hanuman unleashed his energy and began to destroy the asoka-grove. Birds and beasts ran in all directions out of fear. The demonesses took to their heels. Some of them, who were guarding Sita, and who were asleep, woke up and seeing this vanara, demanded of Sita: "Who is this?" Sita replied: "How do I know who it is? Only a snake knows

where a snake's legs are! I, too, am frightened, not knowing who he is: I, too, think that he is perhaps a demon."

All the demonesses ran to Ravana's presence and reported the matter. They said: "a vanara who is powerful and terrible to look at has devastated the asoka-grove, O lord! Some of us saw him speak to Sita. But Sita does not reveal his identity. We do not know who he is. He may be a messenger from Indra or Kubera or Rama himself, come to find out where Sita is. It is also significant that though this vanara destroyed the whole of the asoka-grove, he did not touch the area where Sita is, nor the Simsapa tree under which she is confined."

Ravana was enraged. Immediately he ordered a number of slaves (kinkaras) to go to the asoka-grove and capture Hanuman. They went armed with all sorts of crude weapons. They assailed him. Hanuman gave out a battle-cry: "Victory to Rama, to Laksmana, and to the king Sugriva! I am Rama's servant and messenger, Hanuman by name, who destroys all his enemies. Not a thousand Ravanas are equal to me in might! I shall destroy Lanka, bow to Sita and return." The army of slaves was soon disposed of! And, the demons who witnessed this battle reported the tragedy to Ravana.

agamisyati sugrivah sarvesam vo nisudanah

ne 'yam asti puri lanka na yuyam na ca ravanah (43.25)

The Asoka-grove had been destroyed; and the slaves had been killed. But Hanuman was not satisfied. He turned his attention to an important monument, heavily guarded by Ravana's soldiers. Stretching himself tall, and swelling with enthusiasm, Hanuman climbed up that monument and began breaking it, filling the whole of Lanka with that sound. He shouted triumphantly from the top of that monument: "Victory to Rama! Victory to Laksmana! Victory to Sugriva who is protected by Rama! I am Hanuman, the messenger of Rama. Even a thousand Ravanas cannot stand before me in battle. I shall destroy Lanka, bow to Sita and return."

Seeing him and hearing this, a hundred demons posted to guard the monument rushed towards him with iron maces, clubs and other such weapons. The mighty Hanuman shook the monument; the pillars broke loose and their clash sparked off a blaze; Hanuman killed the demons with a pillar. Once again Hanuman proclaimed: "There are thousands of vanaras

even more powerful than I am .Sugriva will soon arrive here, surrounded by them, for your destruction. Then there will neither be a Lanka, nor all of you, nor even Ravana, who has earned the enmity of Rama.

All this was duly reported by the demons to Ravana. At his command, a mighty demon named Jambumali came to fight and to capture Hanuman. The duel was terrible. Jambumali hit Hanuman with various weapons and wounded him. The bleeding vanara looked beautiful even then. Hanuman lifted a huge rock and threw it at Jambumali who broke it with his missiles. Hanuman picked up an iron mace from the field and hurled it at Jambumali with great force. Jambumali was dead.

Ravana then sent the seven sons of his ministers. They were adepts in aerial combat. Their bombers thundered and roared as they arrived on the scene. They began to shoot at Hanuman even before they reached him. Hanuman, too, flew into the sky and successfully dodged the shots.

This was followed by a fierce hand-to-hand fight. None of the seven heroes could stand before Hanuman. Within a very short space of time, he killed all of them. The whole place was strewn with shattered remains of the planes and the dead bodies of the slain demons. Blood flowed freely, like a river. The cries of the wounded filled Lanka.

Hanuman stood triumphantly in the archway to the grove.

na hy aham tam kapim manye karmana pratitarkayan

sarvatha tan mahadbhutam mahabala parigraham (6)

Next, Ravana sent five mighty warriors who were commanders of his army to deal with the vanara. They were Virupaksa, Yupaksa, Durdhara, Praghasa and Bhasakarna. He cautioned them in the following words:

"Go with a sizeable army. Be vigilant and do whatever may be necessary, having due regard to the place and time. I do not think we are dealing with a vanara. I have considered all that this vanara has done, and I have to come to the conclusion that he is a mighty being endowed with extraordinary prowess. It is quite possible that the gods, our enemies, have bred a specially powerful being to kill us. You have so far defeated all sorts of beings -- gods, sages, demons and demi-gods. And I have known several mighty vanaras -- Vali, Sugriva, Jambavan, Nila, Dvivida etc. But none of them has the prowess that this vanara has. Strive your utmost, therefore, to take him

prisoner- I know you are capable of dealing with any being on earth -- even the gods and demi-gods. But be vigilant and protect yourselves : for in a war success is unpredictable."

The five commanders proceeded towards the Asoka-grove. They saw there the mighty Hanuman, shining like the sun just risen; they could see that he was excellent and great in every respect -- very fast-moving, exceptionally courageous, exceedingly strong, very wise, fired with supreme enthusiasm, and endowed with a very strong body. As soon as they saw him, all of them fired at him simultaneously. Hanuman was injured: but the injuries appeared to be flowers crowning his head.

Hanuman flew; and he was pursued by Durdhara. In the course of this aerial combat, when Durdhara was flying at a low altitude, Hanuman dived right on Durdhara's aircraft, like lightning hitting a mountain. The aircraft crashed; Durdhara was dead.

Hanuman continued to course through the air. Virupaksa and Yupaksa took off in their aircraft and began to fire at Hanuman. Suddenly, Hanuman landed in the grove, pursued by the demons. And, before they could reach the ground, he pulled out a big tree and hit their crafts with it. Both these demons were killed.

Praghasa and Bhasakarna attacked Hanuman. They used a spear and a dart and engaged in hand-to-hand fighting. Hanuman fended their attacks off, picked up a huge rock which looked like a mountain-peak and threw it at them. And, that was their end.

na khalv ayam na 'bhibhaved upeksitah parakramo hy asya rane vivardhate

pramapanam tv eva mama 'sya rocate na vardhamano 'gnir upeksitum ksamah (29)

Ravana was worried. When the death of the mighty commanders at the hands of the vanara was reported to him, he looked round and then gazed at his young son, Akşa. Aksa was young, but even then he was fierce and aggressive. Aksa took his father's gaze to be a question and sprang to his feet, eager to fight. Not a word was exchanged between father and son, but they under- stood each other very well.

Aksa jumped into his aircraft. This was an extraordinary craft. It had been acquired after great effort and great sacrifice. It was plated in pure gold. It

had turrets of precious stones. It had eight engines and, propelled by them, it was cap- able of attaining the speed of the mind! It could not be as- sailed by even gods and demons. As it coursed through the air, it looked like lightning. It was equipped with eight gun-tur- rets for firing missiles, pointed in the eight directions. All the parts of this craft were held firmly together by cords of pure gold.

Hanuman was surprised to see Aksa. As they stood facing each other, emitting terrible fire as it were, everyone who witnessed this combat trembled with fear. Aiming accurately, Akşa fired three shots which wounded Hanuman's head.

For a moment Hanuman reeled. But, when he realised that it was Ravana's own son that he was facing, his enthusiasm returned to him. Even as Hanuman continued to look at Akşa in great fury, the latter continued to fire. Hanuman roared fiercely. He flew. Aksa followed him in hot pursuit, firing his missiles all the time: Hanuman dodged all of them with great dexterity.

Hanuman thought: "He looks like a boy, but his deeds are not those of a boy. At first I thought I should not kill this little boy. Surely, he is a brilliant child. But, he is powerful and can fight with even gods and demons. If he is disregarded, he will overpower me; hence I shall kill him. A spreading bush-fire should not be ignored."

Having thus made up his mind, Hanuman fired at the eight engines and silenced them. With his craft thus shattered in its vulnerable parts, Aksa fell down with the craft. Aksa took up his sword and rushed towards Hanuman. Hanuman caught hold of the legs of Aksa, whirled him in the air and dashed him on the ground. He was dead.

na khalv iyam matih srestha yat tvam sampresayamy aham

iyam ca rajadharmanam ksattrasya ca matir mata (13)

The death of Akşa at the hands of Hanuman was surely a severe blow to Ravana who, however, did not show his grief. He turned to his other son Indrajit of matchless valour. He said to Indrajit: "My son, you have fought even the gods and won a victory over Indra. In all respects you are my equal. When you join a battle, I feel confident of victory. Now, this vanara has killed all our slaves, as also Jambumali, and the sons of our ministers, and

even your brother Akşa. I think you should tackle him. It is no use taking a big army; for the men panic or get killed. Even ordinary missiles and weapons do not seem to have any effect on this vanara: but I know you will use whatever missile is called for with due consideration to time and place. It may be said that it is unwise for me to send you, my eldest son: yet that is the dharma of a king. You too should Learn military tactics and acquire proficiency in war by winning victories over enemies."

That was enough for Indrajit who set out to where Hanuman was. His own aircraft resembled Garuda, the divine bird, and was equally swift. It had four engines each like a tiger, which were all equipped with sharp 'teeth'. Indrajit, whose prowess was equal to that of Indra, boarded this craft and proceeded with incredible speed.

Hanuman felt happy when he saw Indrajit himself coming. In fact, the firmament was crowded with gods and demi-gods who were eager to witness this battle. Hanuman, too, began to fly. He successfully evaded all the missiles of Indrajit.

Indrajit realised that Hanuman could not be killed. He decided to take him prisoner. Even for this purpose, he had to use the most powerful missile, the one dedicated to Brahma the creator. Hit by this, Hanuman fell down: it did not kill him but only bound him, incapacitated him. Hanuman enjoyed such a boon from Brahma himself that even that missile would affect him only for an hour or so. Yet, he thought to himself: "I do not have the power to break the bonds of this supreme missile; I should honour the missile and allow myself to be bound by it." Moreover, he said to himself: "Even this is good; for surely I shall be able to meet Ravana face to face."

Seeing him fallen, the demons crowded round him, hit him, and tied him with ropes. This freed Hanuman from the missile's effect at once: for such is the law, that spiritual power does not co-exist with physical power. Yet, Hanuman remained docile. They dragged him to the presence of Ravana.

aho rupam aho dhairyam aho sattvam aho dyutih

aho raksasarajasya sarva laksana yukttata (49.17)

Hanuman gazed at the resplendent Ravana who was excellent in every way. Ravana was seated on a crystal throne which was inlaid with jewels and had the most expensive covering. Hanuman looked at him and thought: "What

charm, what heroism, what nobility of being, and what splendour; Ravana is wonderfully endowed with all the excellences. If only he were not devoted to unrighteousness, he could well be the ruler of heaven, nay even of its ruler."

Ravana was struck by the majesty of Hanuman's appearance and the strength which was evident. He commanded his ministers to ascertain the purpose of his visit to Lanka and why he had laid the Asoka-grove to waste. The ministers addressed their questions to Hanuman and cautioned him: "Tell us the truth, and you will be released. If you utter falsehood, you will not live!"

Hanuman replied: "I am not a messenger of the gods or demi- gods. But I am a messenger from Sugriva. As I wished to meet Ravana in person, I pulled down the trees in his pet grove. And, when the demons attacked me, I killed them in self-defence."

Turning to Ravana himself, Hanuman said: "I have a message from Sugriva. You know Sugriva and he is like a brother to you." Hanuman then narrated the story of Rama's birth and exile, the loss of Sita in the forest, Rama's friendship with Sugriva, and the search for Sita organised by Sugriva.

"O King! I tell you what is good in the past, present and future. Accept my advice. Restore Sita to Rama. A glorious king like you should not stoop to such unrighteous conduct and abduct another's wife. No one in the three worlds can face the terrible power of Rama and his brother Laksmana: Rama killed the mighty Vali with just one shot. I have done a difficult task: I have discovered the whereabouts of Sita. Soon, Rama will complete this task.

"You cannot persuade Sita to accept you, any more than a virulent poison can be digested. Listen to me, and do not forfeit the fruits of merits acquired by you in your previous birth. Sita is surely the terrible Kalaratri who has been brought here for your own destruction. Restore her to Rama. Else, you will see Lanka burning and all the demons killed. No one, not even you, not even Indra the god of gods can escape Rama's wrath. Rama can destroy all the worlds and create them again! I am a humble servant of Rama and his messenger: what I have said to you is the truth, listen to me."

grhyante yadi roşena tvadṛso 'pi vipascitah

tatah sastra vipascittvam srama eva hi kevalam (52.8)

Ravana was furious with uncontrollable rage on hearing Hanuman's words. He ordered Hanuman's immediate execution. However, Ravana's brother Vibhishana intervened and counselled Ravana as follows:

"O mighty King! If even you can be overpowered by anger, then surely knowledge of scriptures is a useless burden. Be composed; and let proper punishment be meted out to this vanara after due deliberation.

"The scriptures forbid the killing of a messenger or an ambassador. For, he is merely advocating his master's cause and he is entirely dependent upon his master. Yet, it is also true that this vanara has destroyed the grove and killed many of your soldiers.

"The proper punishment for such crimes is mutilation of the body, flogging, shaving the head and branding -- disgrace which is worse than death. They who sent this messenger here, how- ever, deserve the death penalty. And, if you kill this vanara then the episode might come to an end there, because no one else on the enemy's side will be able to cross the ocean and come here, and you will not be able to destroy your enemy."

The mighty Ravana appreciated the counsel and accepted it with his intelligence: He modified his order: "They say that the tail is the most important ornament of a vanara; set fire to it. Let this vanara return afterwards. With his tail ablaze take him round the city so that he and his comrades might know that such mischief as he has been guilty of will not go unpunished in Lanka."

The demons bound Hanuman, soaked his tail in oil and set it ablaze. Hanuman thought: "For the sake of Rama's cause I shall endure even this. When they drag me around the city, I shall be able to take a better note of its military strength and gather more military information. It is good that I see Lanka in daylight, too." The demons dragged Hanuman around the city. They announced him as Rama's spy. Some of the demonesses went to Sita and informed her of Hanuman's predicament. Sita prayed to the god of fire: "If I have been faithful to my husband and if I have served my husband; if I have performed any austerities at all, O God, be cool to Hanuman." An icy cold wind began to blow.

Hanuman, too, was intrigued to see that the fire did not burn him nor hurt him. He concluded: "Surely, Sita's grace, Rama's glory, and the friendship

of wind and fire, have mitigated the heat; and fire does not affect me." Hanuman quickly freed himself from the bonds, picked up an iron mace and killed the demons guarding the city. And he began to inspect Lanka once more, with his tail ablaze.

kruddhah papam na kuryat kah kruddho hanyad gurun api

kruddhah parusaya vaca narah sadhun adhiksipet (55.5)

Hanuman reflected again: "I have destroyed the Asoka-grove, killed the demons and met Ravana. I have done all that I wanted to do except the destruction of the fortress of Ravana. What more can I do here, before I return to Rama?" He thought: "My tail is burning; with it I shall burn down the houses of the chiefs of Lanka."

Hanuman flew up and set ablaze, one after the other, all the houses of the foremost among the warriors of Lanka. Flying over Lanka, Hanuman thundered along like a cloud at the time of cosmic destruction. A fierce wind spread the fire. All the state houses were ablaze. Molten metals like gold etc., flowed from the houses carrying precious stones which had adorned the doors and the walls. The demons ran from the buildings thoroughly confused and frightened.

The entire city of Lanka was burnt down by Hanuman. The terrified demons and demonesses said to one another: "Surely he is the chief of the gods; or maybe he is Death itself. Or per- haps he is the embodiment of the power of lord Visnu himself." Everywhere there was weeping and wailing. Tongues of fire reached the sky. The whole mountain on which the city stood was afire. As Hanuman stood on the shore of the ocean and quenched the fire on his own tail, the gods and the sages sang his glories and praised him for his exploits.

Hanuman's joy did not last long. A question arose in his heart: "What about Sita? Was she also consumed by the fire?" Hanuman said to himself: "What a dreadful tragedy it is that blinded by anger I have unwittingly destroyed Sita herself! What sin does man not commit while in the influence of anger; he might even kill his own guru and insult holy men! Surely, he who is able to subdue his anger by patience, he alone is Man. No doubt Sita has been consumed by this fire. What shall I do now? Surely, it is wiser for me to jump into this ocean and perish, too. For, if Rama hears of Sita having been

burnt in the fire, he will die; so will Laksmana, Sugriva and all the people in Ayodhya. What a dreadful sequel to my anger!"

But, Hanuman experienced auspicious omens. And, he reflected: "But, surely, Sita cannot be consumed by this fire. Fire does not burn fire! No doubt it was Rama's grace and Sita's power that ordained that the fire did not burn me! I am sure that on account of her austerities, truthfulness and chastity, Sita is immune to the effects of fire. At the same time, the demi-gods and sages who were roaming the sky announced: "Hanuman has indeed burnt the whole of Lanka; but Sita is safe." Delighted to hear this, Hanuman got ready to return to Rama.

sa tabhyam pujitah pujyah kapibhisca prasaditah

dṛṣṭa site 'ti vikrantah samksepena nyavedayat (57.36)

Hanuman wished to make sure that Sita was in fact safe and well. He went to the Asoka-grove to see her: he said: "I am supremely blessed that you are safe, O divine lady!" Knowing that he was about to depart, Sita felt unhappy: and in a manner characteristic of women, she repeated her own misgivings concerning the power of the vanaras to cross the ocean, and the likelihood of Ravana putting an end to her life before she could rejoin her lord. And, she reiterated that she should not escape along with Hanuman, but that Hanuman should do everything in such a way that Rama destroyed the demons and attained glory and regained her.

Hanuman too once again reassured the noble Sita that all would be well and that soon she would find Rama in Lanka and that her sorrow would soon come to an end. After receiving Sita's blessings, Hanuman went up the mountain named Arista, ready to take off, for he was eager to behold Rama and he was delighted that the mission had been accomplished. Hanuman, the god-son of the wind-god, flew northwards like a huge cloud floating in space. It looked as if as he took off the mountain sank into the bowels of the earth; trees shook and rocks flew from hill tops. A terrible roar was heard in his wake.

Hanuman swiftly flew across the ocean and once again he beheld the Mahendra mountain at a distance. He let out a terrific roar, which filled the entire space. The vanara friends of Hanuman were eagerly awaiting his return on the Mahendra mountain. When they heard the mighty roar, they

knew that he was returning after successfully completing his mission and they were delighted, eager as they were to see him again. Jambavan, the tribal leader, assured all the vanara hordes that the very sound of the roar indicated success of the mission! All the vanaras rushed to the nearby trees, broke the branches and the twigs, wrapped their own garments around these thus improvising flags, and excitedly waved these flags. This was their way of welcoming their hero.

Hanuman landed on a hillside strip. He was warmly received by the leaders of the vanara tribes, who worshipped him. He in turn worshipped the elders. And then he announced: "Sita has been seen. Afterwards, he took Angada aside and narrated in de- tail how he saw Sita in the Asoka-grove, how she had grown emaciated with grief and anxiety, and how she longed for Rama day and night.

Angada complimented Hanuman on his achievement: "No one is equal to you, O Hanuman! You have saved our lives. And, through your grace and help alone can Rama recover Sita.

raghavasya prabhavena bhavatam cai 'va tejasa

sugrivasya ca karyartham maya sarvam anusthitam (58.168)

Jambavan now questioned Hanuman: "Pray tell us everything in detail. How did you discover that noble lady Sita? How does she live? What is the strength of Ravana? Tell us: what should we report to Rama when we meet him and what we should not inform him about."

Hanuman narrated the entire story of his historic adventure: he told them how he met with the obstacles on his flight over the ocean, the Mainaka-episode, the Surasa-episode and also the Simhika-episode. He told them of his encounter with the lady Lanka, his entry into Lanka and the search and the eventual discovery of Sita in the asoka-grove. He told them how Ravana entered the grove, fell at the feet of Sita and begged her to accept him, and how, when spurned by her, he would have struck her dead, but for the intervention of his wife Mandodari. He told them of Sita's grief and Trijata's dream, of the clever way in which he gained Sita's confidence, and how she told him a couple of intimate episodes in her life with Rama and also gave him the jewel as a token of their meeting.

Hanuman then narrated in graphic detail the story of the destruction of the asoka-grove, and the subsequent destruction of the mighty demons sent by Ravana, and how he was bound by the Brahma-missile used by Indrajit. He gave a full description of his meeting with Ravana, of Ravana's anger, of Vibhiṣana's counsel, and the setting ablaze of Lanka. Hanuman concluded: "Everywhere in Lanka I have proclaimed, 'Victory to Rama. Victory to Laksmana. Victory to king Sugriva', and everywhere I have announced that I was only a little messenger of Rama. I have of course been able to do all this only by the grace of Rama, your blessings and as my humble service to king Sugriva."

Hanuman continued: "Sita is truly worshipful and a glorious woman. By her power of chastity she could indeed reduce Ravana to ashes; since he has not been so reduced, I infer that he too has a vast store of merits earned by austerities and penance. But I am also confident that by our combined strength we deal with Ravana and his forces. I can deal with Ravana myself, if all of you approve of it! Who on earth can face the mighty Jambavan, or angada, or Nila, or Mainda or Dvivida? Whatever we decide to do must be done quickly, for Sita's condition is indeed pitiable. She is clad in that one piece of cloth with which she was borne away by Ravana. She sleeps on the bare ground. Indeed, she is the picture of grief. She was, however, happy to hear of the alliance of Rama and Sugriva. Her devotion to Rama is unshakeable. She could easily curse Ravana and bring about his destruction; but in the destruction of the powerful Ravana, Rama has to play his part as an instrument."

raghavo nṛpasardulah kulaṁ vyapadisan svakam

pratijnaya svayaṁ raja sitavijayam agratah (6O.11)

Angada's enthusiasm was greatly roused, when he heard Hanuman extol the mighty strength of the vanaras that constituted the search party under the leadership of himself. He declared spiritedly: "as a matter of fact, the two vanaras Mainda and Dvivida who have earned the boon of invincibility in battle, from Brahma himself, are capable of conquering Lanka. And, i am aware, too, that single-handed i can kill Ravana and conquer Lanka: and when you are all with me, the task is made much easier. i, therefore, feel that we should not go to Rama and tamely report to him that Sita has been seen and that she has, however, not been recovered. We have such strength,

heroism and valour assembled here. We should not return to Kiskindha before fully accomplishing Rama's mission. You have already heard from Hanuman that he has burnt Lanka and that the foremost among the commanders and warriors of Ravana's army have already been killed by him. Very little remains to be done by all of us together. I therefore suggest that we ourselves should go to Lanka, kill all the remaining heroes, and recovering Sita, should see Rama with Sugriva and Laksmana. And then we shall place Sita between Rama and Laksmana."

Jambavan intervened and said: "I do not think that your proposal is wise, O Angada. We were sent out by king Sugriva with the express command to search for Sita and find out where she is. And, that mission has fully and satisfactorily been accomplished by Hanuman. We have no authority to fight with it may not be Ravana and to recover Sita on our own strength. Pleasing to Rama to learn that we vanaras fought with the de- mons and recovered Sita. Rama has vowed that he would himself recover Sita. We should certainly help him in this mission but we should not substitute for him. And, that will enable us to witness the extraordinary prowess of Rama. Let us, therefore, return to Rama straightaway and report the whole matter to him. We shall then reach a decision as to the next step."

Everyone, including Angada, applauded and accepted this wise counsel.

On the way, they came to a grove known as Madhuvana, famous for its sweet honey. The vanaras gave themselves up to play. They teased each other, they pulled each other, they slapped each other in fun: they were hilarious. They obtained the permission of the elders in the party to take some honey from that grove. Having obtained the permission, however, they began al- most to ruin the grove! Seeing this, the guard Dadhimukha pro- tested. He even hit some of the vanaras. But the vanaras soon overpowered Dadhimukha, intoxicated as they were; and they continued to devastate the grove.

prito 'smi so 'ham yad bhukttam vanaṁ taih krta karmabhih

marsitam marsaniyam ca cesṭitam krta karmanam (63.27)

Hanuman heartily encouraged them in their consumption of the honey and the devastations of the grove! He said: "I shall keep all intruders away; drink the honey to your heart's content." Angada said to Hanuman: "Truly, to

celebrate your vic- tory, O Hanuman, we would do your bidding even if it were un- worthy: with what great joy we should obey you when your com- mand is so palatable!!" Brushing the guards aside, the vanaras entered the Madhuvana in vast numbers and denuded it of fruits and honeycombs. They drank the honey to their hearts' content; they got drunk. They played with one another, using the wax as balls.

The guards who had been overpowered and ignored, went to Dadhimukha with the complaint: "Encouraged by Hanuman, the vanaras have destroyed the Madhuvana; and we too have been nicely beaten and shown the path of the gods!" Once again Dadhimukha went to where the vanaras were revelling. Seeing him, the vanaras rushed forward to attack him. Angada himself attacked Dadhimukha. Angada was completely drunk and did not show the least mercy towards Dadhimukha even though the latter was related to Sugriva. Angada beat him up and threw him on the ground.

Surrounded by the guards, Dadhimukha immediately went to Sugriva to report the matter. As soon as he entered the presence of Sugriva, Dadhimukha fell on his face and saluted the king. Sugriva questioned him as to what had happened. Dadhimukha related the facts; he said: "Madhuvana, which had so long been zealously guarded by you, by Vali and even by your father, has completely been destroyed, O King, by the vanaras!" as he was thus complaining to Sugriva, Laksmana who was also present, questioned Sugriva: "What does he say?""

Sugriva replied to Laksmana: "O Laksmana, this vanara who has been appointed to guard the Madhuvana is complaining that the vanaras whom we have sent in the southerly direction for the search of Sita have entered the Madhuvana and destroyed it. This makes me feel that the purpose has been accomplished. Otherwise they would not behave in this manner. Surely, Sita has been seen, and that, too, by none other than Hanuman himself. That particular party consists of the very best among the vanaras with Jambavan, Angada and Hanuman; and hence I was sure that they would not fail. I infer from their action that they have returned from Lanka after having seen Sita."

Turning to Dadhimukha, Sugriva said: "Even the misdeeds of one who has accomplished his purpose have to be put up with; hence, continue to guard

the Madhuvana. Go there and ask the vanaras to come here immediately. Rama, Laksmana and Myself are very eager to see them all at once.

tau jatasvasau rajaputrau viditva tac ca 'bhijnanam raghavaya pradaya

devya ca 'khyatam sarvam eva 'nupurvyad vaca sampurnam vayuputrah sasamsa (65.27)

Dadhimukha returned to Madhuvana. He approached Angada humbly and apologetically. The vanaras, too, had become sober in the meantime. Dadhimukha said to Angada: "O Prince, I do realise that all of you are fatigued having travelled afar; surely you need to nourish and refresh yourselves. Pray, let all the vanaras eat and drink the fruits of this grove to their hearts' content. You are the crown prince; and you are our lord and the owner of this grove. I reported your arrival here to your uncle Sugriva. The king asked me to request you to proceed to his presence quickly as they are all eagerly awaiting you".

Angada turned to the vanaras: "O vanaras, I beleive that the news of our arrival has reached the ears of Rama, too. From the way in which Dadhimukha narrates the king's orders, it appears as though all of them rejoice to hear of our return. I suggest it is time we returned. But, I shall do nothing against your wishes. Though I am the crown prince, I have no right to impose my wishes upon you; but I shall abide by your wishes."

The vanaras replied: "O Prince, who other than you would have uttered such words? In this world a man who enjoys some little power is intoxicated with it and thinks I am everything.' We, too, wish to proceed immediately to the presence of Sugriva; and we await your command to do so."

Angada thereupon said: "Let us go." And, the party turned towards Kişkindha. Sugriva noticed Angada ready to land, and pointing him out to Rama said: "It is certain that Sita has been found, and that it was Hanuman who discovered her whereabouts. With Hanuman, Jambavan, Angada and other heroes in this search party, it is impossible that the mission has failed. Moreover, they would not have dared to devastate Madhuvana if they had failed. Hence, O Rama, take heart. Your sorrow is nearing its end."

There was great tumult in the air as the vanara forces began to arrive. Angada landed close to Sugriva. He, Hanuman and the other leaders now approached Sugriva with hands joined in salutations. Rama was supremely

delighted to hear from Hanuman, "Sita has been seen." Laksmana gazed with pride and gratitude at Sugriva. Rama gazed with supreme affection at Hanuman.

Rama then questioned Hanuman and the latter narrated in great detail how he crossed the ocean and how he went into Lanka and saw Sita seated at the foot of the Simsapa tree. He assured Rama that Sita was constantly thinking of him and him alone. Hanuman realised that Rama and Laksmana had absolute confidence in him and narrated all the events that took place in Lanka, and handed to Rama the jewel that Sita had given him.

yatha 'ham tasya virasya vanad upadhina hṛta

raksasa tad bhayad eva tatha na 'rhati raghavah (68.13)

The sight of that jewel revived the memories of Rama and even so his grief. He burst into tears. Fondly gazing at it, he said: "My father-in-law presented this to Sita on the occasion of our wedding. It was actually given by him to my father who then fastened it to Sita's hair. Hence when I look at this I am reminded of my father, my father-in-law, and it is as if I have seen sita. O Hanuman, kindly narrate to me in detail all that she said to you: for when I hear of what she said, it soothes my heart."

Hanuman thereupon narrated in great detail the dialogue between him and Sita. He also repeated to Rama the story of the crow which she had told him as a token of their meeting. He said: 'Sita wishes me to ask you; 'You are such an adept in the use of the most powerful missiles, why then are you not rescuing me from the captivity of Ravana?' She also prays again and again: 'If you have any affection for me, kindly come soon and take me back, for I shall not be able to live for more than a month.'"

Hanuman then told Rama how he had offered to carry Sita away on his own back so that she could be reunited with Rama immediately, and that Sita had declined saying it would be Adharma. Hanuman said: "She politely turned down the offer saying: 'It is not dharma, O Hanuman: when I was abducted in the forest, Ravana touched my body; but then I was helpless and so how could I prevent it?' And, she asked me to do whatever would be necessary for you to defeat Ravana in open combat and recover her."

Hanuman said further: "Having accomplished my mission, I was in a hurry to return to you. Sita again pleaded with me to inform you of her sad plight

and to urge you to go to Lanka quickly. She further said: 'I do not wish that Rama should take me away from here as Ravana took me away stealthily from the forest; that is not worthy of Rama." She then began to entertain doubts about our ability to cross the formidable ocean. I reassured her that in Sugriva's army there are hundreds and thousands of great heroes far more powerful than I am, who could easily cross the ocean and fight the demons, conquer Ravana and rescue her. I even told her that in Sugriva's army there is none inferior to me, and in support of this I said: 'Who would send the greatest hero as a messenger; the wise ruler would only send a third-rate hero as a messenger.' I assured her that you would soon invade Lanka, and in open combat kill Ravana and recover her honourably. Thus did I console the noble Sita and she derived great consolation from my assurances."

END OF SUNDARA KANDAM

YUDDHA KANDAM

23rd AUGUST

The Great War.

yo hi bhṛtyo niyukttah san bhartra karmaṇi duṣkare

kuryat tad anuragena tam ahuh purusottamam (1.8)

Rama said: "A great and extremely rare feat has been accomplished by you, O Hanuman, and a great service rendered to Sugriva, the king. In this world there are three types of servants. The best of them carries out the work allotted to him by the master, and goes even farther and, creatively anticipating the master's wishes, fulfils them, too. The mediocre servant does not, though capable, do anything more than what the master commanded him to do. And the worst of servants is he who, though capable, does not even carry out the master's wishes. You, O Hanuman, are the very best; you did a lot more than what king Sugriva had asked you to do, and yet did not do anything which the master would have been displeased about.

By finding out the whereabouts of Sita, you have truly given a new lease of life to Laksmana and to me, and to the whole dynasty of the Raghus. What can I give you as a reward? At the present moment, I can give you only this, my warm embrace." So saying Rama warmly embraced Hanuman who was thrilled.

Rama turned to Sugriva and said: "Sita has been found but not yet recovered. In order to do so we have to cross this formidable ocean. How can we accomplish this task?" Sensing Rama's deep concern, Sugriva endeavoured to reassure him: "Pray, do not entertain any misgivings, O Rama. We shall soon cross the ocean, kill Ravana and recover Sita. Grief and despair are the forerunners of failure. The vanara forces are already excited by the prospect of a fight with the demons; and they are ready to jump into the fire for your sake. We should now explore ways and means of building a bridge across the ocean. But, give up grief which robs one of valour; when a ruler yields to grief and despair, he becomes inactive. An inactive ruler is useless; and people fear only the brave."

Rama regained his self-confidence and said: "I can easily cross the sea by the power of my austerity, by building a bridge or by drying up the ocean!" In answer to his query, Hanuman said: "Lanka has four gates equipped with drawbridges, and is surrounded by a dreadful moat. It enjoys fourfold protection : a river circles it, it is set on a hill, it is surrounded by thick forests, and it is heavily fortified, with walls and moats. Each gate is guarded by hundreds of thousands of demons; and there is a huge pile of weapons at each gate. These weapons are six feet long and can fire a hundred rounds at the same time, killing hundreds simultaneously. The drawbridges are cleverly operated by engines, and they are gold-plated as a further protection against rust and enemy-attack. However, I have damaged these drawbridges and filled the moats with their debris. As for crossing the sea, just a handful of the foremost among the van- ara leaders will accomplish the task: it may even be unnecessary to take the whole army."

sokas ca kila kalena gacchata hy apagacchati

ca 'pasyatah kantam ahany ahani vardhate (5.4)

Hanuman's account of Sita's predicament and his 'intelligence report' concerning the military strength of the enemy inspired Rama to take a quick decision. He declared: "I shall immediately invade Lanka and destroy it!

This is an auspicious hour and today is auspicious for military ventures. O Sugriva, order the army to march. O Nila, let the army march by that route on which plenty of food is available. If the demons dis- cover our preparation for invasion, they might try to poison the fruits and roots; extreme care and vigilance are necessary. Some of the vanaras should go ahead and conduct a careful reconnaissance: there may be demons waiting en route to ambush our army."

The king Sugriva and the commander-in-chief of the tribal forces, Nila, issued quick instructions for the army to march.

The army crossed rivers and lakes and passed mountains and forests. All the soldiers were highly enthusiastic and were eager to fight, and to recover Sita; they marched without resting anywhere. And all their actions and every movement of their limbs gave some indication of their prowess.

When they reached the Mahendra mountain, Rama went up to the peak of the mountain. From there he beheld the vast ocean. Surveying it from where he stood, he said to the vanara-chiefs: "O Sugriva, we have now reached the shores of this ocean; _ the problem which we faced earlier now confronts us. Let the vanara armies be comfortably settled on the shore and then let us devise ways and means of crossing this ocean. At the same time, pray ensure that all possible precautions are taken against enemy infiltration and sabotage."

The army settled down on the sea-shore: it looked as if it were another ocean, only brown-coloured. The noise of the vanaras drowned the roar of the ocean. And, the leaders of the vanara forces settled down, looking at the vast ocean to con- sider ways of crossing it.

Rama grieved for Sita. He said to Laksmana: "O Laksmana, people say that as time fades away, grief fades away, too: But in my case it grows worse with the passage of time. Oh, when will I behold my beloved? When will I hold her face in my hands and kiss it? When will I closely embrace my sita, her full, firm breasts pressing my chest? The thought that the time-limit set by her for her recovery is slipping away causes me unbearable agony, O Laksmana." Laksmana comforted him suitably.

sahito mantrayitva yah karmarambhan pravartayet

daive ca kurute yatnam tam ahuh purusottamam (6.8)

In Lanka, a worried Ravana called an assembly of his counselors and commanders. He said to them: "An impossible task has been accomplished; an impregnable city has been penetrated; the indestructible has been destroyed and mighty heroes have been killed. And, all this by a simple vanara. Pray, consider what ought been to be done and advise me. Three types of statesman Have been described by the wise. The best among these is one who commences his ventures after consultation with his ministers and with the blessings of god. The middling is one who consults only himself, decides the right course of action and carries it out according to his own decision. The worst is one who fails to consider what is right and what is wrong, who ignores the divine, and who says: I will do it'. In the same manner, consultation itself can be divided into three categories. The best consultation is one in which the counsellors reach unanimous agreement which is in accord with the scriptures. Where there is a lot of argument and counter-argument before unanimity is reached is regarded as a mediocre consultation. Where each counsellor adheres to his own view and where no unanimity is reached -- such a consultation is the worst. Pray, consider among yourselves the best course of action."

In spite of this elaborate briefing, the demons impetuously jumped up, each brandishing a weapon like an iron club, javelin, sword or spear, and exclaimed: "Lord, what need is there for you to be afraid of Rama? You conquered many gods, demi- gods and demons. Rama is not equal to any of them, let alone claiming equality with you! One Indrajit alone will be able to deal with Rama and his mighty army! Pray, send him at once, and that will be the end of your enemies."

In similar strain, the commanders of the demons spoke. Prahastha said: "We were literally taken unawares by Hanuman. If we had been prepared, we could have easily disposed of him." Durmukha said: "However, we should not take this lying down. I shall myself go and destroy the vanara army. "Vajradamsṭra said: "But, why think too much of Hanuman? Think of Rama, our real enemy. I shall go alone and kill him with my iron mace. I also suggest a simple tactic by which the entire vanara army may be killed. A contingent of the most terrible demons should approach Rama disguised as human beings, and say to him: 'We come from Bharata to help you'. At an opportune moment, they should fight the vanara army and destroy it." Kumbhakarna's son Nikumbha said: "None of you need worry: I shall

immediately go over there and kill Rama single-handed." And Vajrahanu said: "I shall myself go and swallow Rama and return."

sa babhuva kršo raja maithili kama mohitah

asammanac ca suhṛdam papah papena karmaṇa (11.1)

The demons who had thus counselled Ravana were impatient to prove their boast and to show their mettle; they stood up with their own weapons raised, shouting: "We shall immediately kill Rama, Sugriva, Laksmana as also that vanara Hanuman who devastated the city of Lanka." Vibhisana rose from his seat, restrained the demons, and said to Ravana:

"There are occasions when one should resort to violence and there are occasions when it is unwise to resort to violence, brother. It is unwise of you even to hope to vanquish in battle Rama who is a master of himself and has the support of the divine. all of you have already had a foretaste of the strength, the valour and the intelligence of Hanuman: it is rash to assume that we can face him in battle. The worst error in military strategy is underestimation of enemy-strength.

"and, there is the other extremely important consideration. For what offence do you wish to fight and to kill Rama? In fact, you are guilty of abducting his wife. If you say you did so as revenge for Rama's killing of Khara and others, even that is not proper: Rama killed Khara in self-defence, only when the latter attacked him.

"abandon this unrighteous action, before Rama's might and the strength of the vanara hordes destroys you. Give up hate which destroys happiness as well as dharma; and adhere to dharma which increases joy and fame; hand over Sita to Rama and let us live with our children and relations." Ravana did not reply, but retired to his own apartments.

The next morning, Vibhisana once again sought the presence of his brother Ravana, and said: "Since the day you brought Sita to Lanka, there has been a succession of evil portents which spell the destruction of Lanka and its inhabitants. Before the evil destiny which these evil omens portend overtakes us, it is good to make amends; and hence I appeal to you to restore Sita to Rama." Ravana abruptly dismissed Vibhisana, curtly tell- ing him: "I am not afraid of Rama, and I will not give up Sita!

Passion for Sita and the disaffection of his own people had begun to tell upon Ravana's health, and he was becoming emaciated day by day. He had resolved upon war. He mounted his richly-decked chariot and surrounded by the commanders went to the council chamber. He then commanded his messengers to convene an emergency meeting of his council, for, he said, "I have extremely urgent matters to discuss."

yah pascat purva karyani kurute buddhi mohitah

purvaṁ co 'ttara karyaṇi na sa veda naya 'nayau (12.32)

Ravana addressed the assembly. At the very commencement, he ordered the commander-in-chief Prahasta: "Pray, ensure immediately that the defence of the city of Lanka is impregnable and that all the arms of the defence forces are well placed and equipped." This order was immediately carried out.

Ravana continued his address to the council: "Sometime ago, I abducted Sita, the beloved wife of Rama, and brought her from the Dandaka forest to Lanka; she is the most beautiful woman I have seen so far. I have endeavoured to persuade her to accept my hand and my love; but she has so far spurned them. She had asked for a year in which to make up her mind and I granted this.

"Now I understand that her husband Rama is preparing to invade Lanka along with a formidable army of vanaras. I do not know if they will all be able to cross the ocean. On the other hand, you all know what havoc was wrought by one of the vanaras who had come here as but a messenger. And, we do not know what steps the enemy might take to accomplish his purpose. On the other hand, so long as I have your wholehearted support, I do not fear anyone on earth, let alone the human being Rama. Only the other day you enabled me to attain victory over the gods. May I therefore suggest that we should now discuss ways and means of achieving my aim: Rama and Laksmana should be killed and Sita should not be returned from Lanka."

Kumbhakarna was filled with anger and retorted: "Why did you not consult us before you went to Dandaka and abducted Sita? He who does today what ought to have been done earlier, and he who does earlier what ought to be done later he does not know the course of right action. He who engages himself in right action does not regret nor repent, O Ravana. However, you

have now called us for consultations and wish to fight Rama. We shall all stand by you and destroy Rama. Fear not."

Mahaparsva, another demon leader, said: "achieve your purpose by force, O King! Seduce Sita by force; and then there is nothing to be afraid of. We shall deal with Rama suitably." Ravana said in answer to this: "alas, I cannot do that. Listen to a misadventure of mine. Once upon a time, a celestial nymph was thus seduced by me. She was Punjikasthala; and she reported my conduct to Brahma the creator who thereupon cursed me: 'If you thus forcibly seduce any other woman from now on, your head will burst into a hundred pieces.' Hence I am not able to force Sita to accept my love. Yet, I am confident that I will kill Rama and then Sita will have no choice but to accept me."

vaset saha sapat nena kruddhena 'štviseṇa va

na tu mitra pravadena samvasec chatrusevina (16.2)

Vibhisana spoke: "Before the terrible vanaras invade and destroy Lanka, before Rama's missiles take your life, restore Sita to Rama."

Prahastha intervened and said: "How silly! We have no fear even from the gods! And, none whatsoever from Rama."

Vibhishana continued: "You are all mistaken in your estimation of the power of Rama. None of you will be able to with- stand his missiles. Those of you who encourage the king in his evil action are indeed his enemies. They who have enjoyed the king's favours have the duty to restrain him, if necessary by force, from unrighteous and self-destructive actions. He indeed is a real minister who counsels what is good for the master, having fully considered his own and the enemy's strength, and the possibilities of increase or decrease or steady maintenance of such strength."

Indrajit, Ravana's son, leapt to his feet and said: "Uncle, you are a disgrace to the race of demons. Such cowardice as you have betrayed is unworthy of even mortals, much less of us demons. Uncle Vibhisana is utterly weak and timid, and there is no heroism nor prowess in him. I defeated even Indra, the god of gods; should I be afraid of the mortal Rama? The least among the demons can look after Rama; there is no cause for fear." Vibhisana continued: "You are but a young lad, Indrajit: and you speak like one. Unfortunately, however, you are bragging your way to death. I repeat, the

only wise course is for us to restore Sita to Rama, along with wealth and jewels."

Ravana was greatly enraged to hear this repeated advice of Vibhisana. He said: "One may live with an enemy or a venomous snake, but not with a hypocritical friend who is devoted to the enemy. Indeed, O Vibhishana, one's own worst enemy is a close relative who is guided by his own self-interest. Such a kinsman is hostile to even a righteous king and is ever intent on bringing about his downfall. Wealth exists in the cow; from kinsman only fear flows; women are noted for fickleness; and the brahmana for austerities. It seems to be natural, my brother, that you do not like that I should prosper. I have shown you all my affection; but I realise that affection bestowed upon the hostile is fruitless and can even be dangerous. If what you said had been said by someone else, I would have had him executed: but, what shall I do with you, traitor!"

Vibhishana replied: "They at whose door death knocks do not heed good counsel. In this world, O King, there are many who utter pleasant words; but very rare indeed is one who proffers unpleasant but wholesome advice, and rare is one who listens to such advice. Forgive the offence I have given you. Save your- self. May all be well with you."

sakrd eva pra pannaya tava 'smi 'ti ca yacate

abhayam sarva bhutebhyo dadamy etad vratam mama (18.34)

Having spoken his mind to Ravana, Vibhisana immediately flew to where Rama was, accompanied by four of his devoted demons. When the vanaras saw that a demon was flying towards their camp, they were alarmed and sought Sugriva's permission to shoot him down. While still airborne, Vibhisana announced his identity and his intention: "I am the brother of Ravana who has sought his own doom by having abducted Sita. I have abandoned my wife and children and I seek Rama's asylum. Pray, inform Rama, the refuge of the whole world, that Vibhisana seeks his refuge."

All the vanaras sought Rama's presence. Sugriva opened the discussion, with the words: "He is from the enemy; he is an enemy. He may be a spy. He may be an infiltrator. In any case he is suspect. Give us leave to kill him, O Rama." Rama sought the advice of the vanara-leaders.

Others advised cautious investigation. Hanuman, however, differed from them all and said: "Vibhisana has rejected his unrighteous brother and sought you, O Rama. He should be accepted. None of the other courses suggested is feasible. If he is an enemy and a spy he cannot so easily be discovered as such by our spying or by our interrogation. His face is calm and tranquil, and his demeanour humble and pure: there is no suspicion in my mind."

While Rama approved of this, Sugriva cautioned him: "He has betrayed his own brother; whom else would he not betray?"

Rama, while appreciating the wisdom of these words, said: "Kinsmen are normally friendly to oneself; but in the case of rulers, however, the reverse is true! His own kinsmen and the rulers of neighbouring states are the king's worst enemies. In this light you can understand why Vibhisana has abandoned his brother and come here. In this world all brothers are not like Bharata, all sons are not like me, nor friends like you!

"We have heard how a dove offered hospitality to a hunter, its own enemy: are we worse than that dove that we are reluctant to accept Vibhisana? Even so have the sages declared: 'Even an enemy seeking one's refuge should be protected at all costs'. Failure in the protection of refugees is a terrible sin, indeed. This is my firm vow: if one seeks my refuge just once and says: I am yours, him I shall protect from all fear. Hence, I have granted asylum to whoever has come, whether it is Vibhisana or Ravana himself! Bring them to me.

Sugriva was delighted. "We shall now regard Vibhisana as one of us," Sugriva declared.

tena cai 'nam mahaprajnam abhisinca vibhisanam

rajanam raksasam ksipram prasanne mayi manada (19.25)

Vibhisana, having obtained the vanaras permission to land, circled above the field and landed. Along with his four companions Vibhisana fell at the feet of Rama.

Rama asked him, at once: "Pray, tell me truthfully, what is the strength of the demons and their weakness, too." Vibhisana replied: "Ravana has a boon from Brahma the creator that he shall not be killed by the gods, demons, demi-gods, snakes and birds. Kumbhakarna, his brother, is possessed of

terrible might. Ravana's army chief, Prahasta, is also a mighty hero. So, too, is Indrajit, Ravana's son, who has magic powers, too. Ravana has millions of demons who constitute his army."

Undaunted, Rama declared: "I shall kill Ravana along with his commander-in-chief and others; and I shall crown you king this I promise."

Rama decided to seal this friendship immediately. He asked Laksmana to fetch water from the ocean: "And with that water, crown Vibhisana king of Lanka: for he has earned my pleasure. Laksmana promptly brought the water, and as the astonished vanaras were looking on, Vibhisana Vibhişana was consecrated consecrated king of Lanka.

Vibhişana advised them: "The deity presiding over the ocean is indebted to Rama: it was Rama's forefather who rendered a great service to the ocean. Hence, I suggest that Rama should propitiate that deity and ask for a way to cross the ocean." Rama accepted that advice and took up his seat near the ocean.

A spy named sardula had surveyed the strength of the vanara forces and reported the concentration of the troops on the sea-shore to Ravana. Greatly disturbed by this report, Ravana summoned Suka and said: "Go at once to the other shore and say to Sugriva: 'You are like a brother to me. What offence have I caused you in that you wish to invade Lanka along with your army?'"

Assuming the form of a bird, Suka immediately arrived at Sugrivas camp and delivered Ravana's message. The vanaras began to assail Suka but were restrained by Rama. Sugriva replied: "Tell Ravana; 'I am neither your friend nor benefactor. You have antagonised Rama and hence you deserve the same treatment as was meted out to Vali! You boast of your prowess. Why then did you kill the aged Jaṭayu? Why did you not take Sita away in the presence of Rama? Nay, your life has come to an end!'" As the bird was about to fly away, Angada said: "It is not a messenger; it is a spy which should be killed!" As the vanaras seized the bird, it appealed to Rama who requested the vanaras to release it alive, saying: "It is but a messenger of Ravana and should not be killed." It was however kept in protective custody.

arujams cai 'va sailagran sikharani prabhanjanah

divisprso maha meghah sangatah samahasvanah (22.11)

On a grass mat with his arm alone as his pillow, Rama reclined, vowing to propitiate the god of the ocean and thus to secure his help to cross over to Lanka. The arm that had gifted thousands of cows, the arm that had been adorned by unguents and ornaments, the arm that Sita had used as her pillow, the arm whose strength inspired fear in the enemy-hearts --that arm was the sole support for the head of Rama, the ascetic, as he lay down on the sea-shore praying to the god of the ocean to show his grace. Rama resolved: "I should now cross this ocean; or I shall dry up the ocean."

He lay there for three days and nights, without any sign of the ocean-god's pleasure. Rama was seized with impatience and anger. He said to Laksmana: "Here is an example, O Laksmana, of how the wicked misinterpret the noble man's virtue : they think it is his weakness! The world respects only the man who is loud and noisy, vain and aggressive! Neither fame nor victory is won by a peaceful approach, O Laksmana. See what I do now. Bring my weapon and bring the missiles. I shall dry up the ocean so that the vanaras may walk to Lanka.'

Rama got hold of his formidable weapon and took a few terrible missiles and discharged them at the ocean. These caused such a violent commotion that they whipped tidal waves of huge proportions. The creatures of the ocean, the huge snakes and other deep-sea creatures were disturbed and distressed. Mountainous waves rose in the sea. There was a terrifying roar from the ocean. Even Laksmana was frightened.

Rama looked at the ocean and said in great anger: "I shall dry up the entire ocean! Utterly deprived of your essence, O ocean, only a sand-bed will remain." He took the most powerful missile endowed with the powers of the Creator himself and hurled it at the ocean. The effect of this was unimaginable and be- yond description. Mountains began to shake. There was an earth- quake. There was dense darkness everywhere. The course of the sun, the moon and the planets was disturbed. The sky was illumined as if by the sudden appearance of thousands of meteors. Accompanied by deafening thunderclaps, the sky shone with lightning. Gale-force winds swept the surface of the earth and the ocean Even the peaks of mountains were dislodged.

Living beings everywhere cried in agony. The waters of the ocean were stirred up so suddenly and with such force that it appeared as though the ocean would overstep its bounds and sub- merge the land.

samudram ksobhayamasur vanaras ca samantatah

sutranyanye pragṛhnanti vyayatam satayojanam (22.62)

The deity presiding over the ocean then rose from the ocean and meekly approached Rama. To Rama who was standing burning with anger, his weapon ready to discharge the most deadly missile, the Ocean said:

"Rama, everything in nature is governed by the immutable law which alone determines the inherent characteristic of every element in nature. In accordance with that law, it is natural for the ocean to be unfathomable and impassable. Yet, I shall suggest a way out, and I shall indicate the path by which the vanaras will be able to go over to Lanka."

Rama asked the Ocean: "against whom shall I direct this unfailing missile which has been readied for the purpose of drying the ocean?" and the Ocean pointed to the well-known Drumakulya inhabited by sinners: directed to this spot, Rama's missile dried up the ocean there, and, in order to compensate for this action, Rama blessed that piece of land: "You will be fertile and you will be full of fruit-bearing trees."

The Ocean said: "Rama, here is Nala who is the son of the great Visvakarma (the architect of all). Let him construct a bridge across these waters, for he is as good as his father. I shall gladly support that bridge."

Nala at once voluntarily offered: "What the Ocean has said is indeed true. I shall construct the bridge across these waters: and I am as proficient as my father. Actually, the Ocean owes a debt of gratitude to Rama, for a great service was rendered by Rama's ancestors to the Ocean. Yet, it was not gratitude that inspired the Ocean to give way; fear did it! The ungrateful man in this world recognises only punishment, not love or affection."

At Rama's command, thousands of vanaras got ready for the mighty undertaking. They cut down logs of wood; they rolled away huge rocks and stones. They threw all these into the ocean which was greatly agitated by this. Some of the vanaras held a plumbline so that the rocks could be placed in a straight line. With the help of the vanaras of immeasurable strength and mighty deeds, Nala put up the bridge across the ocean, using logs of wood,

rocks and stones. The eight hundred mile long bridge took five days to build. Celestial beings (devas or beings of light) and Gandharvas (celestial musicians) watched this marvellous feat.

As soon as the bridge was completed, Vibhisana stood guard at the southern (Lanka) end, to prevent sabotage by the enemy. Sugriva then said to Rama: "Let Hanuman take you and let Angada take Laksmana, to Lanka." They were ready to depart.

abravit prahasan vakyam sarvabhuta hite ratah

yadi drstam balam krtsnam vayam va supariksitah (25.18)

Soon Rama was on the other side of the ocean. He beheld Lanka, shining with decorations; and his heart sought Sita. It would not be long before he recovered her. Rama said to Laksmana: "Look, O Laksmana, the beautiful city on the hill which was constructed in days of yore by the architect Visvakarma. With its multi-storeyed buildings, gardens and grove, it shows all the signs of extreme affluence."

Rama then asked Sugriva: "Order the release of the messenger of Ravana, Suka who had come to us in the disguise of a bird." as soon as he was released, Suka returned to Ravana's palace, and reported to Ravana: "I went to Sugriva and gave him your message. But, the vanaras caught hold of me and would have killed me, but for Rama's timely intervention. They have built a bridge and have crossed the formidable ocean with the vanara army. Rama with his deadly weapon and missiles is here. Only two courses are open to you now: either restore Sita to Rama or fight."

Ravana declared with great vehemence: "I will not give up sita, even if I have to fight with the gods and demi-gods and demons. Oh, I am eagerly waiting to shoot Rama and see him bleeding. Rama has no idea of my might and is why he is foolish enough to ask for a fight."

At the same time, Ravana was anxious within himself; and he called upon two demons, Suka and Sarapa and said to them: "Effectively mask your identity and penetrate into the enemy's army. Ascertain its strength and report everything in detail. I could not believe it when I was told that they had built a bridge across the ocean; but now there is no doubt that they are ready to fight. Hence it is good that we should have a correct account of their strength."

The demons disguised themselves as vanaras and stealthily entered the vanara forces. Seeing the vastness of the army, they were bewildered and could not estimate the number and the strength. Vibhisana apprehended the two spies. He took them to Rama and said to him: "Here are two demon-spies, O Rama : they deserve to be executed." Rama said to them: "Have you seen everything, O demons? Then go back to Ravana and report to him. If you have not seen everything, I shall gladly ask Vibhisana to show you, so that you can present a full and complete account of our strength to Ravana." Thus released by Rama, they went to Ravana and Sarana said to him: "O King, I was caught by Vibhisana, but it was Rama who saved my life. He asked me to convey to you the message that he would invade Lanka and destroy it tomorrow itself. Enough of this hostility with Rama, O King, pray; make peace with him."

aruroha tatah sriman prasadam hima panduraṁ

bahutala samutsedham ravano 'tha didṛksaya (26.5)

Ravana said sternly to Sarana: "You are frightened, coward! But I will not give up Sita even if I have to fight the very gods, demi-gods and demons of the whole world." Immediately, Ravana went up the palace which was a white house with golden domes, and which had the height of several palmyrah trees placed one on top of another, (or, which had many storeys). From there he saw the whole country covered by the vanara forces.

Ravana thereupon commanded Sarana: "Come here and point out to me who is who in this army. Who are the commanders and what is their strength?"

Sarapa replied: "That powerful vanara standing at the head of the army, by whose shouts Lanka shakes, is Nila. That hero who paces the ground with great fury is angada, Vali's son. Behind him is Nala, the builder of the bridge. That white vanara Sveta is a big organiser and is Sugriva's military adviser. There stands Kumuda. And there is Canda, surrounded by countless van- Even so is Rambha yonder surrounded by countless vanaras. That fearless vanara is Sarabha, who has an equally vast army. Those two mighty vanaras are Panasa and Vinata. That Krodhana is a mighty commander. Undaunted and fearless even of death, there Gavaya stands at the head of a huge force. Even the commanders of this mighty army cannot be counted: and they are all intrepid heroes. They are all utterly dedicated to the cause of Rama, and determined to win.

"There stands another leader, Hara, who is followed by numerous commanders of the army. And, there is Dhumra, the leader of another tribe. Yet another tribe is led by the powerful Jambavan who once assisted the king of gods, Indra, and won many boons from him. And, you see yonder a lordly vanara whom all the other vanaras stand gazing at: he is Rambha. The gigantic form you see over there is Samnadana. That other vanara Kranthana is said to have been begotten by the god of fire. Even so is that other leader Pramathi a vanara of incomparable might.

"The leader of yet another tribe known as Golangulas is the mighty vanara known as Gavaksa.

"Another tribe of vanaras inhabit the foremost among mountains; they are of different colours and of incomparable and fierce valour. All of them are assembled here.

"And, all of them are standing there filled with eagerness, in readiness to fight and destroy Lanka. The supreme commander Satabali is also seen there: desirous of victory, he worships the sun every day. All of them are utterly dedicated to the cause of Rama to whom they are devoted. For his sake they are ready to give up their very life."

hanyam aham tv imau papau satrupaksa prasamsakau

yadi purvo 'pakarair me na krodho mrdutam vrajet (29.13)

It was Suka's turn and he gave a description of the other heroes in the enemy force. He said:

"Those vanaras you see over there are in truth the off- spring of gods and demi-gods; they have immeasurable strength; they can even change their forms. The two commanders you see over there are known as Mainda and Dvivida; it is said that they have had a taste of the nectar of immortality. Surely, you re- cognise that vanara standing over there! He is the same Hanuman who burnt Lanka.

"You are probably aware that the two princes standing near Hanuman are Rama and Laksmana. The one standing next to Hanuman is Rama who adheres to dharma and who is protected by dharma. He is a pastmaster in all branches of knowledge, and he is equipped with the supreme missile known as the Brahma-missile. If he so desired, he could split the heavens and even split the earth, too. His anger is death; and his prowess is equal to Indra's.

And, Laksmana standing next to him is Rama's alter ego and would not mind doing anything to secure Rama's victory.

"No doubt you recognise that Vibhisana is with them. I hear that Rama has consecrated him king of Lanka. You see Sugriva also there: the celestial necklace he wears, as also Tara the wife of Vali and the kingdom of Kişkindha were all bestowed upon him by Rama after he had killed Vali.

"Behold, O great King, this mighty army which looks like a planet on fire; considering its strength, take such steps as would ensure your victory.

Ravana was worried. But he directed his fury at the two spies, Suka and Sarana. He said to them: "Traitors! You sing in front of me the praises of my enemies who are about to fight with me. Of what value is your scriptural learning if you do not even know how to talk to and in front of your king? I would have killed you for your misbehaviour; but I do not do so considering your past services to me. Get out of here immediately."

Ravana commanded other spies to come to him. He ordered them: "Go to Rama's camp at once and find out without arousing anybody's suspicion, what Rama's plans are. Watch carefully and report to me, how he sleeps, how he wakes up and what he is do- ing now. One who thus knows the habits and movements of the enemy easily overcomes him."

They entered Rama's camp; but Vibhisana detected their presence. But, merciful Rama had them freed! At the same time, the vanaras assaulted them. Thus harassed, the spies returned to Ravana.

na te carayitum Sakya rajan vanarapungavah

vikranta balavantas ca raghavena ca raksitah (30.5)

Sandila returned to Ravana's presence and said to him: "O king, it is not possible to spy on Rama's army: they are very Powerful and above all they are protected by Rama. In fact, we were all apprehended immediately on entering their ranks: and we escaped with our lives only because of Rama's mercy."

Ravana immediately summoned his counsellors for consultasion. After Apprising them of the latest position, he took the demon Vidyuva with him and both of them went towards the Asoka-grove. Vidyujjihva possessed the power to materialise any object by a mere wave of his hand. Ravana said to

him: *Pray, conjure up an exact duplicate of Rama's head as well as of his weapon and missile; and give them to me."

At once the demon produced the desired articles, and received an expensive reward from Ravana. Ravana proceeded in the direction of where site was seated; followed by the demon. Calmly approaching sita, Ravana said to her:

"O charming lady, the man for whose sake you live like this, he whom you expect to recover you from me, he who killed mighty demons like Khara, your husband Rama has been killed by me! That is the end of your hopes, O sita! And the time has come for you to reconsider your position and be my wife.

*This Rama had hoped to kill me, destroy Lanka and take you back. He had assembled a vast army with the help of Sugriva; he had even had a bridge built across the ocean; and he had actually arrived at the very gates of Lanka. The sun had set. And, Rama and the commanders of his army were all asleep. Some of my soldiers quietly entered the enemy's camp and killed all the commanders. While Rama was asleep, my commander-in-chief, Prahastha severed his head with a sharp sword. Vibhişana has been taken prisoner. Laksmana and the army he had under his command fled. Sugriva had his neck broken. Hanuman lies dead with his jaw broken to pieces. Jambavan is dead. Even so have the other heroes been disposed of without any resistance whatsoever. All the vanaras have fled for their lives; their leaders have been killed.

"I thought you would like to see your husband's head, soaked in blood and sand. Here it is."

Ravana motioned to Vidyujjihva to place Rama's head in front of Sita. Ravana said: "Place the head of Rama in front of Sita; let her see for herself the final state of her husband!" Ravana then placed the weapon of Rama and the missile before sita: "Here is the weapon used by Rama and here is the missile. Now I am sure you will consent to be my wife."

sadhu pataya mam ksipram ramasyo 'pari ravana

samanaya patim patnya kuru kalyanam uttamam (31)

After a moment's stunned silence, Sita burst into tears and wailed aloud: "O Kaikeyi! Your wish has been fulfilled today. The mission that you

inaugurated by disturbing the mind of king Dasaratha has come to fruition today with the death of the beloved prince of his dynasty." Wailing thus aloud, Sita fell down like a felled banana tree.

Sita continued to lament: "Alas, O Rama, you have adhered to your dharma; but I have been widowed. Widowhood is considered an undesirable tragedy in the life of a woman devoted to dharma. Oh what a tragedy! You came to save me, but gave your own life. Astrologers well versed in the study of celestial bodies and their movements had predicted that you would live long: alas, their predictions have proved false. You were ever alert and wise; and yet you have been slain in your sleep! When the time comes, even the impossible becomes possible, Time indeed is the greatest power on earth which brings everything to fruition. Moreover, you were a pastmaster in the political science as also in the use of weapons: yet, here you lie embraced by the demon of destruction. And, here lie your weapons which I used to worship every day!

"I suppose you are now happy, having rejoined your beloved father in heaven. But, why have you deserted me? Don't you remember what you said on the day of our marriage? You said then: 'We shall always practise dharma together'. Pray, take me, too, with you. It is terrible even to think of: that body which I so lovingly embraced is perhaps being ravaged by beasts! How cruel and unjust: that you who worshipped the sacred fire so regularly are denied the privilege of a proper cremation! When Laksmana returns to Ayodhya, alone of the party of three that left Ayodhya, how greatly mother Kausalya will grieve. Nay, she will give up her life, too. And, O Rama, I am the wretched woman who has brought about all this destruction! Ah, his own wife became Rama's death."

Turning to Ravana, Sita said: "O Ravana, place my body over Rama's and kill me, too. Place my head along with his, and my body with his: I shall also go along with him. Kill me. You will be rendering me the greatest service. It will be your most auspicious action, in that you bring a husband and wife together."

While she was thus wailing, a messenger urgently sought the presence of Ravana and said: "Lord, your ministers need you urgently." Ravana departed at once. When Ravana left the scene, the head and the weapons of Rama also disappeared. Ravana conferred with his ministers and ordered

general mobilisation: "Get all the demons together; but do not tell them what for," he instructed.

srutva tu tad vanara sainya sabdam lankagata raksasa raja bhrtyah

nasṭau 'jaso dainya parita cesṭah sreyo na pasyanti nrpasya dosaih (34.28)

As soon as Ravana left the scene, a demoness known as Sarama appeared on the scene. Approaching Stta with love and affection, Sarama said to her: "Give up your sorrow, O Sita. Whatever Ravana said was false. Rama's head and weapons were produced by magic. Rama has not been killed! I am convinced that he cannot be killed. He and also his brother Laksmana are able to defend themselves admirably. I know for certain that Rama and the army of vanaras have crossed the ocean and arrived at the very gates of Lanka."

Hearing the tumultuous sound outside the grove, Sarama continued: "O Sita, the army of Ravana is being mobilised and troops are marching for war. The roads are blocked with the troops. They are marching to their doom, and to usher in your happiness, O Sita. I feel convinced that soon Rama will enter Lanka victoriously. Soon you will behold your beloved husband. Soon I will behold you, my very dear friend, seated on the lap of your husband. He will wipe your tears and you will be re- united. Rest assured of this, my dear Sita. For the present, pray, adore the sun, the Lord of all beings."

This was great consolation to Sita. Šarama wanted to do Sita a more concrete favour and said: "I can go where I like, unperceived by anyone, O Sita. If you like I can go to Rama, see him, talk to him and return to you."

Sita said to Sarama: "If you wish to do me a favour, O Sarama, then please go to where Ravana is and find out what he is doing and what his plans are."

Sarama departed at once, went to Ravana's court, and re- turned to the grove soon and said to Sita: "I went to Ravana's court and heard all that took place there. Many of his ministers advised him to restore you to Rama and make peace with him. Ravana's mother admonished him severely: 'Remember how easily Rama disposed of thousands of demons in Janasthana, single-handed. Remember how the heroic Hanuman performed the almost impossible task of crossing the ocean and discovering Sita. Even when thus advised by his ministers and his own mother, Ravana remained stubborn,

not wishing to give you up. Impending death be- fuddles his mind. Rama will first take his life, and then take you back, O Sita."

At the same time, upon hearing the roaring of the vanara- forces, Ravana's army marched forward: they who had lost their lustre, and who saw no good coming out of the war, doomed by the sin of their ruler.

asrjad bhagavan paksau dvav eva hi pitamahah

suranam asuranam ca dharma 'dharmau tad asrayau (35.12)

Ravana held counsel with his ministers, as his troops began to march towards the city gates. One of his counsellors who was also his maternal grandfather, spoke up:

Malayavan said: "The vital part of statesmanship is right judgement, for there are occasions when one should attack and there are others when one should make peace.

"Ravana! The Creator gave birth only to two types of sentient beings in this world, the divine and the diabolical. Dharma is the characteristic of the former and adharma that of the latter. The pendulum swings constantly between the two. In one epoch (the Satya Yuga), virtue or dharma keeps adharma under control; in another (the Kali Yuga) adharma prevails. In two : the present age, however, there is imbalance between the two and you have by your wicked actions of great magnitude actually tilted the balance in favour of adharma. As a consequence, terrible destruction awaits you and your people. You oppressed the holy sages, devoted as you were to power and pleasure. But those peaceful and holy ones carried on their religious practices: and the smoke that arises from the sacred fire worshipped by them spreads in the ten directions and brings about the destruction of the demons, O Ravana.

"You have asked for immunity only from being killed by the gods, demi-gods and demons; now you are being invaded by human beings, vanaras and other tribal people. I see terrible evil omens. Clouds rumble making terrifying sounds. Horses and elephants weep. Donkeys are born of cows, and rats of mongooses. Cats mate with leopards, pigs with dogs, and demi-gods with de- mons and humans. The end of the demons is near. I think Rama is lord Visnu himself, incarnate in human form. Hence make peace with him."

Ravana was furious once more. He thundered: "You do not even know what is correct and appropriate behaviour: You who belong to my court are advocating my enemy's cause! If Rama is Visnu, then I have snatched away goddess Laksmi herself who is may in my possession now: why will I give her away? Oh, no: I may even break into two, but I shall not bow down, never! This is my native characteristic, even if it be a fault; and one's native characteristic is difficult to overcome. I assure you, I will kill Rama in no time!" Malayavan pronounced his blessings upon Ravana and left the court.

Ravana instructed the foremost among demons to guard the three city gates, resolving to be present at the northern gate himself. Having thus assured the city's defence, hailed and adored by the ministers, Ravana dissolved the council and re- turned to his inner apartments.

eko hi kurute papam kalapasavašam gatah

nicena 'tmapacareṇa kulam tena vinasyati (38.7)

Rama and his friends had reached the outskirts of the city and were at the foot of the Suvela mountain. Vibhisana submit- ted to Rama: "O Rama, my four counsellors have returned with the latest intelligence. They went into the palace of Ravana, effectively disguised, and have learnt that the demon has got his army ready and has also posted three mighty demons to guard the three gates of the city, while he would himself guard the fourth, the northern gate." Vibhisana continued: "O Rama, the forces marshalled by Ravana are of terrible strength, in fact much more than those with the help of which he invaded the stronghold of the gods and won a victory over them. I am not saying this to frighten you, hence do not be annoyed with me; I am giving you this warning so that your anger can be sufficiently aroused, for then you are invincible."

Rama considered how his own army should be deployed and gave the following instructions: "Nila should take the eastern gate guarded by Prahastha. Añgada should challenge Mahaparsva and Mahodara at the southern gate. Hanuman should similarly attack Indrajit stationed at the western gate. I shall myself proceed towards the northern gate, along with Laksmana, and fight with that wretched demon who is the oppressor of the world, and I shall myself kill that wicked demon. The vanara army should go, each tribe with its own distinctive appearance: by such uniform shall they be easily distinguished. They should not copy our appearance, so that

Vibhisana and his four demon-ministers, Laksmana and I can be easily distinguished."

Followed by the vanara leaders, Rama then climbed the Suvela mountain, and said: "We shall spend this night here. We shall from here also gain a good look at Lanka. Whenever I think of that evil-minded Ravana my anger is roused: he does not seem to know what dharma is, and he does not care for the code of right conduct nor for the prestige of his dynasty, and hence is devoted to base and diabolical conduct. I shall soon destroy that base and immoral demon. Alas, one person who is doomed to destruction, sins; and as a result his whole clan perishes."

When the night was past, the vanaras and Rama looked over in the direction of Lanka. The vast and extensive forests around Lanka looked beautiful. And, the vanaras roamed that forest, raising a cloud of dust. At a distance the Trikuta mountain was seen; and on top of it, the golden city of Lanka. It was dotted with seven-storeyed mansions, palaces, fortifications and towers. Ravana's own palace had a thousand pillars and was a sky- Scraper. Rama, Laksmana and the vanara leaders surveyed that glorious city.

idanim ma krtha vira evamvidham acintitam

tvayi kimcit sama panne kim karyam sitaya mama (41.4)

Rama and Sugriva, too, were surveying the glorious city of Lanka from atop the Suvela mountain. They saw at some distance, Ravana himself seated on the look-out on the northern gate of the city. He was attended by the royal paraphernalia-- fly-whisks and a lovely white canopy. He was richly attired, ornamented and waited upon. At the very sight of Ravana, impulsively and impetuously, Sugriva rushed towards him. Even while he was airborne, Sugriva said to Ravana: "I am the servant and friend of Rama, the emperor of the world, O demon! I shall seize you today, and you will not be able to escape from me." Ravana immediately gave a suitable reply; he said: "Ah, it is you Sugriva! You were Sugriva (one with a lovely neck) till I saw you; now you will be deprived of your neck (Hinagriva)."

As Sugriva landed near Ravana, he tossed Ravana's crown down. Ravana caught hold of Sugriva and dashed him upon the ground. Sugrtva, however, got up unhurt. There ensued a breath- taking wrestling duel.

Expert wrestlers that they were, they pinned each other to the ground. Still wrestling they fell into the wedge between two sections of the great defensive wall. Soon they regained their place on top of the wall and continued to fight each other, using the different wrestling tactics. Powerful as they both were, they did not grow fatigued. They constantly shifted their positions and the postures of their bodies. They delivered, received and dodged each other's blows. Now they pounced on each other; now they closed in on each other; and now they retreated from each other.

Ravana realised that he could not defeat Sugriva in straight forward wrestling, and therefore he decided to use his supernatural talents. Sugriva realised what Ravana was about to do, and he took off. While the baffled Ravana was still looking on, Sugriva flew in the direction of the Suvela mountain. Having accomplished a difficult feat and having worn out Ravana's strength, he retired to Rama's side.

Rama did not appear very pleased. He said to Sugriva : "Without duly consulting all of us, you impulsively rushed away, O Sugriva: kings do not indulge in such rash actions. You kept us all wondering. Pray, do not do like this any more: if something had happened to you, what would I do with Sita or Bharata or the other brothers, or even with this life of mine? Surely, after killing Ravana, I would have crowned Bharata king and given up my life. Realising this, do not put your life in danger." Sugriva replied: "Forgive me, O Rama: but when I be- held that wicked demon who had abducted your wife, I could not restrain myself!"

avatirya ca dharmatma tasmac chailat sa raghavah

paraih parama durdharsam dadarsa balam atmanah (24)

Rama said to Laksmana: "It is time that all our troops took up their positions and remained extremely alert. It is essential that plenty of food and water should be made readily available to all and their continued supply ensured. We are on the brink of a terrible war in which I can foresee right now great destruction on both sides. Even the preparations made by both the parties are agitating the wind, and producing earth-tremors. Clouds have assumed a fearful aspect. The sun is fiercer than ever. Even the moon seems to have lost its coolness. Animals are wailing everywhere. The sky is polluted and therefore the stars are not clearly visible. It is time to invade the city."

Saying so, Rama descended from the mountain look-out and reviewed his forces. Rama led the siege, and he was immediately followed by the foremost among the vanara heroes, each one of them surrounded by his own division of the armed forces. Soon they reached the city of Lanka. The forces deployed themselves as they had been previously instructed by Rama. Rama and Laksmana accompanied by their own forces stationed themselves out- side the northern gate of the city which was defended by the mighty Ravana himself: the forces besieging this gate could obviously not be protected by anyone other than Rama. Similarly other leaders took their position at the other gates, thus lay- ing a siege to the city of Lanka.

The forces composed of vanaras, rksas and other tribes in their thousands and tens of thousands, organised into a hundred divisions, laid siege to the gates of Lanka -- there were others ready to reinforce these. Rama summoned Angada and said to him: "Dear friend, please go over to Ravana and give him one final warning, the final ultimatum. Tell him: 'Surely, you are about to reap the bitter fruits of all the misdeeds you have perpetrated against the gods, sages, demi-gods and human beings. Though emaciated and weakened on account of my separation from Sita, I shall still be able to serve you with those bitter fruits. I will rid this earth of all demons, if you do not immediately surrender yourself to me, bringing Sita with yourself. When you and your comrades have been killed, Vibhisana will be king of Lanka. If you do not accept my offer, then come prepared to die.'"

Angada immediately sought Ravana's presence and duly delivered Rama's message. Terribly enraged, Ravana had him captured by his soldiers. Four of them caught him. Angada sprang up, along with the soldiers, dashed them on the ground, and became airborne before he could be captured again, this time breaking the dome of Ravana's palace. He returned to Rama and reported the events.

etasminn antare ghorah samgramah samavartata

raksasam vanaranaṁ ca yatha deva 'sure pura (42.41)

The demon-leaders reported to Ravana that Rama's vanara- army had surrounded the city and was threatening to storm the gates. Ravana went up the northern gate and gazed with fiery eyes at Rama and the vanara army.

Rama urged his army forward with great enthusiasm. As he looked at Lanka, his heart was afire with the thought: "Here is sita, undergoing untold hardships." Thus thinking of the afflicted Sita, Rama urged the vanaras who were themselves full of zest. The vanaras rushed forward, exclaiming: "We shall hurl thousands of rocks on Lanka; we shall tear the demons to pieces." Throwing trees, rocks and grass into them, the vanaras filled up the moats surrounding the city. Then they began to scale the walls of the city. Others began pounding the golden gates, shouting: "Victory to Rama, Laksmana and Sugriva". Rama and Laksmana, supported by Vibhisana, Gavaksa, Dhumra and their forces, led the attack on the northern gate.

Ravana's army was equipped with more sophisticated weapons; and even the drummers wielded golden sticks. Drums and conches sounded everywhere as the demons were urged forward to defend the city. The two armies closed in: and it looked like the legendary battle between the gods and the demons.

The demons had excellent vehicles and were clad in golden armours. The vanaras, though they did not have these, were full of personal valour and zeal. The mighty demons challenged the vanara heroes to_a_duel. Indrajit faced Angada, Prajangha faced Sampati, Jambumali faced Hanuman, Satrughna faced Vibhisana, Tapana, faced Gaja, Nikumbha faced Nila, Praghasa challenged Sugriva, Virupaksa challenged Laksmana, and four demons, (Agniketu, Rašmikėtu, Suptaghna and Yajñakopa) fought with Rama. Even so, other demons fought with other vanara heroes. Blood from the bodies of the demons and vanaras flowed freely, with trunks and heads separately floating in it.

Jambumali wounded Hanuman who in turn killed him. Sugriva killed Praghasa who had taken a heavy toll of the vanaras. Laksmana killed Virupaksa. Angiketu and the other three attacked Rama who aimed four missiles at them and killed them instantly. Nikumbha injured Nila who picked up the chariot wheel of Nikum- bha himself and killed him with it.

The mighty Dvivida hit the demon Asaniprabha with a big tree and killed him. Vidyunmali, riding a chariot, attacked Susena who picked up a big tree and hit the chariot with it. Then Susena picked up a huge rock and with that killed the demon, though the latter in the meantime delivered a powerful blow in the chest of Susena.

raksaso 'siti harayo haris ca 'siti raksasah

anyonyam samare jaghnus tasmims tamasi darune (44.3)

The battle continued, during the night, too. The vanaras shouted: "Are you a demon?" and fought the demons; the demons shouted: "Are you a vanara?" and fought them. The demons who were dark could be distinguished by their shining gold armour. Yell- ing war-cries, all of them fought ferociously. With their missiles which were like venomous snakes, Rama and Laksmana killed numerous demons, whether they were visible or they were invisible. It was like the night of cosmic destruction. When six powerful demons attacked Rama, he returned their fire, and the missiles used by Rama illumined the night sky. They were dead. More and more demons rushed towards Rama, and all of them were quickly destroyed.

Angada continued his battle with Indrajit. Angada wounded the powerful son of Ravana, and destroyed his chariot and horses. Indrajit was tired, and hence became invisible. The gods and the sages who were witnessing this extraordinary feat applauded Angada's valour.

The infuriated Indrajit decided to use his magical powers. Still remaining invisible, he began to direct the most deadly missiles at Rama and Laksmana. They were poisoned missiles. They were showered in such profusion that Rama and Laksmana were literally covered by the wounds inflicted by them. Thus, when he was unable to stand facing them, Indrajit employed his magical powers and incapacitated Rama and Laksmana.

Rama directed ten vanaras to seek the enemy. But Indrajit cleverly evaded them and directed his own powerful missiles at them, as also at Rama and Laksmana. The two noble princes were bleeding profusely. Still remaining invisible, Indrajit said to them: "No one on earth or in heaven can stand before me! Presently, I shall send both of you to the abode of Death!" Saying so, Indrajit directed more missiles at Rama and Laksmana. Each missile found its object, Indrajit roared in joy.

Very shortly, both the princes had bled so profusely that they were literally unable even to look up. Their bodies had been covered with the wounds inflicted by the dreadful poisonous missiles hurled by Indrajit. From their bodies blood flowed like water. Indrajit had used in this encounter the missiles known as naraca (with even and circular heads), ardhanaraca (a

minor type of the same weapon), bhalla (axe-head), anjalika (shaped like palms held together), vatsadantas (like the teeth of a calf), simhadamṣṭra (like lion's teeth), and ksura (like razor's edge). Struck by them, Rama lay incapacitated; his own powerful gold-plated weapon lay by his side.

tam tu maya praticchannam mayayaiva vibhisanah

vikṣamaṇo dadarsa 'tha bhratuh putram avasthitam (46.9)

Rama and Laksmana lay on the battlefield utterly motionless. The vanaras were bewildered; they could not even see the assailant. Vibhişana saw through the magic eye, Indrajit station- ed not far off, but veiled by magic power. Still hidden from view, Indrajit proclaimed: "Struck down by my terrible and pois- onous missiles, Rama and Laksmana lie there: no one on earth can save them. On their account, my father Ravana spent a sleepless night; he will now rejoice, now that they have been killed by me."

Sugriva was stricken with terror, and he was shedding tears. Vibhişana wiped his tears lovingly, and said to him: "Do not give way to grief, O King! This is a time for action: ensure that Rama and Laksmana are well protected during the period of their unconsciousness. They will soon be revived."

Indrajit returned to the court of Ravana, bowed to him and announced: "Rama and Laksmana are dead." Ravana was thrilled; and he warmly embraced his beloved and heroic son. Ravana then sent for the demonesses guarding Sita in the asoka-grove and said to them: "Take Sita in the aeroplane Puspaka and show her the bodies of Rama and Laksmana. When she sees that they are dead, she will of her own accord seek me." Sita had already heard the news through the demonesses. Now, from the aeroplane she actually witnessed Rama and Laksmana lying as though life- less on the battlefield, amidst numerous dead vanaras.

Seeing her husband and her brother-in-law lying as if dead on the battlefield, Sita, overcome by grief, wailed aloud: "Alas, all the predictions of astrologers and other wise men concern- ing me have proved false. They said that I would be Rama's queen; that we should have sons; that we should be very happy together. All the heroic endeavours of Rama, Laksmana and the vanaras in discovering my whereabouts, in crossing the ocean and invading Lanka have proved in vain. Rama and Laksmana both had terrible (nuclear) missiles which could bring down torrential rain, set everything

ablaze, create tidal waves and flood, whip up winds to tornadoes and cyclones, and even destroy every- thing created: these they would not normally use, but why did not they use these when their own lives were threatened? Alas, alas, I do not grieve for any of us: but this is a terrible blow to Kausalya!" Trijata, the noble demoness who was fond of Sita, however, said to her: "Do not give way to grief, O Sita: Rama is not dead. I can see this clearly from the expression on the face. Notice too that the vanaras are guarding the two princes; if they had been killed, the vanaras would flee! Grieve not, they are alive." They returned to the asoka-grove; and in spite of all that Trijata had said, Sita was still grief-stricken.

etasminn antare ramah pratyabudhyata viryavan

sthiratvat sattva yogac ca saraih samdanito 'pi san (49.3)

While the vanaras stood around Rama and Laksmana, grief- stricken, Rama regained consciousness first on account of his mental and physical fitness and also because The was full of purity and light (because he practised sattva-yoga). But, he was greatly perturbed to see Laksmana lying unconscious, as if dead, near him. Rama began to lament: "Alas, what a tragedy: It may be possible to find a wife like Sita, but not a brother like Laksmana. He who could single-handed kill thousands of demons has been struck down by the wicked Indrajit! Alas, I have not been able to fulfil my promise to crown Vibhisapa king of Lanka! O Sugriva, return to Kişkindha with all your surviv- ing vanara leaders. All of you have done your best, but human beings cannot flout destiny. I shall give up my life now." Just then Vibhişana was coming towards them. Mistaking him for Indrajit, the vanaras began to run.

Vibhişana was stricken with grief at the sight of Rama and Laksmana; he despaired of ever gaining the throne of Lanka. Sugriva consoled him and then said to Susena, his father-in-law: "As soon as Laksmana regains consciousness, take both the princes back to Kişkindha; I shall destroy the demons, recover sita and bring her to Kişkindha, too." Susena replied: "I remember the battle which took place in days of yore between gods and demons, in which the gods had similarly been assailed by invisible demons. The sage Brihaspati administered certain remedies, accompanied by prayers, and revived the gods. Those remedies grow on the Chandra and Drona mountains in the middle of the ocean, and they are known as

Sanjivakarani and Visalya: the former brings one back to life and the latter instantly heals all wounds. Commission vanara leaders to fetch them at once."

At that moment, Garuda arrived there, agitating the wind. The moment he arrived, the poisons that had incapacitated Rama and Laksmana left them. Garuda passed his hands over them and felicitated them. At the touch of Garuda, the wounds healed, and their bodies regained their golden hue. Their radiance, virility, strength, enthusiasm, vision, intelligence as also memory, were doubled. Deeply grateful to him, Rama asked him: "By your grace alone have we been saved. Pray, tell me who you are." Garuda replied: "I am your friend, your very life as it were though dwelling outside your body. I am Garuda. Luckily I heard of your predicament and arrived here in time: the poison with which you had been stricken could not be anti- doted by anyone else. May victory attend upon you!" Garuda departed. The vanaras rejoiced to see Rama and Laksmana fully recovered.

tad astra bandham asadya yadi mukttau ripü mama

samsayastham idam sarvam anupasyamy aham balam (51.16)

Ravana heard the hilarious noise that emanated from the vanara ranks, and he asked some demons to find out the cause. Some demons leapt on the city walls and looked over the enemy army, returned to Ravana and reported: "Lo, Rama and Laksmana are well and the vanaras are surely celebrating their recovery from the deadly poison which Indrajit had aimed at them." When he heard this, Ravana felt terribly dejected and remarked: "If these two princes could be revived after being subjected to the deadly attack by Indrajit, I am beginning to doubt the strength of my whole army to withstand them! Our missiles which are as terrible as fire and which have taken the lives of my enemies have been proved to be useless."

Ravana then turned to the terrible demon Dhumraksa and or- dered him: "Proceed at once to the battlefield and destroy all the vanaras. You are indeed most powerful and capable of achieving this." Dhumraksa rushed out of the palace and went towards the western gate guarded by Hanuman, after ordering the commander-in-chief to marshal all the forces in readiness.

as he flew towards the western gate, however, he was sailed by huge birds and vultures. a terrible vulture even landed on his aircraft. He saw many

strange sights in the air. He saw a headless trunk flying in front of him, emitting strange sounds. The entire nature, all the elements, seemed to forebode evil.

The vanaras too were eager for a good fight. The battle that ensued between the vanaras and the demons was indeed exceedingly terrible. The demons used all their missiles against the vanaras; and the vanaras in their turn hurled trees and rocks (druma and sila may be names of missiles, too.) all of them were roaring in fury. The vanaras crushed some demons and made others vomit blood. Some demons were torn by the teeth (danta); the bodies of others were lacerated by nails (karaja). Even so the vanaras were suffering heavy casualties at the hands of the demons. Some were mowed down by the vehicles of the demons. Others were driven out of the field by the demons. The 'twang' of weapons firing resembled the music of stringed instruments; the neighing of horses was like the music of the drum; the trumpeting of the elephants was like vocal music: the sounds of war produced a symphony.

Seeing the demons being harassed, Dhumraksa advanced to- wards Hanuman. Seeing the vanara forces in distress, Hanuman picked up a huge rock and came towards Dhumraksa. With that rock (sila) Hanuman smashed the vehicle of Dhumraksa. Hanuman assailed the demon forces, too. Dhumraksa hit Hanuman with a spiked mace. Unmindful of that, Hanuman picked up a rock which looked like a mountain-peak (giri-Sriga) and hit the head of Dhumraksa with it; Dhumraksa fell.

tad raksasa balam ghoram viprasthitam asobhata

pravṛt kale yatha megha nardamanah savidyutah (53.12)

Distressed to hear that Dhumraksa had been slain by Hanuman, Ravana ordered another mighty demon, Vajradamstra, to proceed to the front. Vajradamstra was an adept in magic. He marched, surrounded by a colourful contingent of army commanders, and followed by a huge army. His own armoured car was thickly gold-plated and decorated with his own personal standard.

They sought to fight the vanaras outside the southern gate besieged by the forces of Angada. Vajradamsṭra noticed terrible evil omens: but he assumed that they forebode the death of the enemy. As this demon-army marched

well set on its purpose, it shone like the clouds of the monsoon, and their gleaming weapons were like the lightning flashes that embellished such clouds.

The demons and the vanaras quickly fell upon one another and there began the most terrible battle. They fought with various weapons. They fought with their bare arms and feet. Even so, the casualties were of different categories. Some had their bodies smashed; others had their skulls smashed. When he saw that the demons were ruthlessly killing the vanaras, Angada came to their rescue and killed the demons. When Vajradamstra saw that the demons were falling in great numbers, he came to their rescue. The demons used various missiles and mystic weapons; and the vanaras pulled out trees and rolled rocks and hurled them at the demons. Both the sides lost a great number of the fighters. As their bodies lay on the battlefield some with their heads broken, some without arms, some without legs, some with their bodies smashed, the vultures and the jackals had a good time.

Angada and Vajradamsṭra faced each other in direct conflict. Vajradamstra directed a thousand shots as it were at Angada. With blood pouring from his whole body, Angada retaliated by hurling a tree (vrkṣam). Vajradamstra broke that tree with a missile. Angada picked up a huge rock (sailam) and threw it at Vajradamsṭra's vehicle. The demon got out just in time to see the armoured car smashed to pieces. Angada threw another huge rock at the head of the demon. Vomiting blood, Vajradamstra fell down and lay on the ground hugging his mace, dazed.

The demon soon got up, dropped his mace and began to wrestle with Angada. Both of them were equally powerful, of equal strength. And after a time both of them were tired. They crawled on their knees, yet they fought. At last Angada drew his sword and chopped off the demon's head. With his body covered with blood, his eyes rolling, the demon fell, with his head severed from the trunk. The surviving demons fled towards Lanka. The vanaras rejoiced.

apujayan devaganas tada kapim svayam ca ramo 'tibalas ca laksmanah

tathai 'va sugrivamukhah plavangama vibhisanas cai 'và mahabalas tatha (56.39)

Ravana was further enraged to hear that Vajradamsṭra had also been killed, and ordered the demon Akampana to be sent.

Akampana acquired that title because he could not be shaken even by the gods in war. His own car was made of solid and pure gold and was invulnerable. Though he was powerful, he was surrounded by the most powerful warriors, and though the day was bright, there was a strange depression in the air and he also experienced omens which forecast evil. As his powerful army marched towards the battlefield, the vanaras got frightened. Intense and furious activity in both the camps raised a cloud of dust in which it was difficult for the warriors even to see clearly the flags and the uniforms of the enemy they were fighting. In this confusion, vanaras killed vanaras and demons killed demons. Indiscriminate killing followed intense fury; and the battlefield was literally covered with muddied blood and dead bodies covered with dust.

Akampana ordered the driver of his armoured car: "Take me to where there is the worst fighting and where the demons are falling in great numbers." Soon Akampana was in the thick of the battle. And, that mighty warrior began ruthlessly to shoot down the vanaras.

Seeing the devastation, Hanuman came forward to challenge Akampana. This raised the morale of the vanara forces. Akampana turned the full force of his missile-power on Hanuman. Hanuman rushed forward in great fury, but he had no weapons; he there-fore picked up a huge rock (sailam), whirled it around and threw it at Akampana. But Akampana broke it with his missile even while it was in the air. Hanuman was angered to see this extraordinary exploit of the demon. He uprooted a big tree known as Ašvakarna and holding it aloft he ran hither and thither in great fury. Akampana was disturbed to see Hanuman rushing towards him with the big tree held in his hand. He fired fourteen shots at the mighty vanara. But Hanuman did not even notice it! He shone like smokeless fire or like the aŝoka tree in full bloom.

Reaching up to Akampana, Hanuman struck him with the tree; the demon fell down dead. The demon warriors thereupon dropped their arms and began to flee in the direction of Lanka. Full of panic, they stampeded out of the battlefield, crushing their own men in the confusion.

The vanaras were overjoyed. They surrounded Hanuman and roared with joy. The gods, the vanara leaders like Sugriva, Vibhisana and even Rama and Laksmana worshipped Hanuman.

apat samsayita sreyo na tu nihsaṁsayikṛta pratiloma 'nulomam va yad va no manyase hitam (57.11)

The killing of Akampana was a terrible blow to Ravana; yet he was not overwhelmed by it. He said to the commander-in-chief Prahastha: "Many of our foremost commanders have been killed by these gigantic vanaras. I cannot think of whom to send next. The outcome of a battle is uncertain. But, then, I think sudden and unforeseen death is preferable to certain death which can be predicted. Anyhow, pray, suggest to me what should be done, whether the advice may be pleasant or unpleasant.

The brave and loyal Prahastha replied: "O King, we have indeed discussed this matter often before. And we had actually foreseen that if the wise course, which was to restore Sita to Rama was not adopted, war was inevitable. This has come true. I have enjoyed your affection and your favours and they have been constant; even so shall my loyalty to you be constant. Neither son, wife or wealth, nor even my life are worth preserving: behold, I shall lay down my very life for your sake."

Filled with rage and with enthusiasm, Prahastha marched to the battlefield surrounded by the picked warriors of Lanka. Before they departed, the brahmanas performed various religious rites for their success. The demons adorned themselves not only with military hardware but with garlands duly consecrated by brahmanas with the recitation of sacred texts. Prahastha mounted his armoured car which shone like the sun, which had been equip- ped with all sorts of weapons, which could move at great speed, and which was even provided with a bumper to avoid collision. Surrounded by several powerful generals, Prahastha marched for- ward, and he looked like the god of death.

Rama ascertained from Vibhisana the identity of this warrior and his strength. Once again, the vanaras and the demons fought a fierce battle. The commanders of the demon forces wrought havoc among the vanaras. But, soon Dvivida killed Nar- antaka. Durmukha killed the demon Samunnata. Jambavan killed the demon Mahanada. And the vanara Tara killed Kumbhahanu. Enraged further by this, Prahastha fought with incredible

fierce- ness and killed the vanaras by the thousands. The entire battle- field resembled a dreadful river of death. But the warriors fought on unmindful of the horror.

Nila, the commander-in-chief of the vanaras, rushed towards Prahastha who showered innumerable missiles at Nila: unable to ward them off, Nila received them with closed eyes, calmly. They fought fiercely for a while. Prahastha used a mallet; and Nila used rocks. While Prahastha rushed towards Nila intent upon killing him, the latter picked up a huge rock and with it killed Prahastha. The leaderless demon-forces fled.

aho diptam ahateja ravano raksase 'svarah

aditya iva dusprekso rašmibhir bhati ravanah (26)

Ravana's fury was explosive. His grief ignited it. He said to the surviving commanders: "It is unwise to underestimate the enemy's strength. Only a warrior of no mean valour would have survived a combat with Prahastha; yet, he has been killed. I shall myself proceed to the battlefield. I shall burn up the vanara army; and I shall irrigate the earth with vanara blood." Saying so, Ravana set out for the battlefield.

Vibhisana briefed Rama for the new encounter saying: "Be- hold Ravana, who shines like the sun, wearing the crown and ear- rings, with a body huge and terrible looking like Vindhya mountain, who vanquished even Indra (king of heaven) and Vaivasvata (the god of death)." Rama looked at the enemy and could not but exclaim: "O what lustre! What radiance! It is difficult even to see him directly even as to see the sun. And, he is surrounded by dreadfully powerful demons, too. Yet, I am glad he himself comes to the battlefield today: I shall direct towards him the great anger that he has roused in me by abducting sita."

Before leaving the city gate, Ravana instructed the leaders of the demons: "Ensure that the gates are well guarded and that every house in the city of Lanka, too, is well guarded. Seeing that I myself and the foremost among our commanders have left the city, the enemy may seize it." Having said so, Ravana ploughed through the vanara army. Seeing Ravana thus devastating the vanara army, Sugriva rushed forward. Picking up a 'mountain-top' (mahidhara-'gram or saila-sṛngam), Sugriva hurled it at Ravana who, with

his missile, broke it into pieces. Ravana then struck Sugriva with a terrible missile, and wounded severely by it, Sugriva fell down, writhing in agony.

Rama grabbed his own weapon, ready to plunge into a direct confrontation with Ravana. Laksmana intervened and said: "Let me go, Rama: I can look after him. A Consenting to this, Rama cautioned Laksmana: "Look for his weak-points, and remember your own weak-points and guard them, both with your weapon and your vigilance." But before he could reach Ravana, he noticed that Hanuman was engaged in a hand-to-hand combat with Ravana. Hanuman said to Ravana: "O demon, you have secured immunity only from the gods and demons; you are not immune from vanaras and humans." Ravana hit Hanuman on his chest; and Hanuman hit him back. This made Ravana reel! Ravana then said to Hanuman: "Praiseworthy is your strength and skill, O vanara!" To which Hanuman replied: "Shame on my strength, in that you still live, O demon!" Once again, Ravana clenched his fist and landed a terrible blow on Hanuman which stupified and incapacitated Hanuman for some time. In the meantime, Ravana turned to Nila.

Asvastas ca visalyas ca laksmanah satrusudanah

visnor bhagam amimamsyam atmanam pratyanusmaran (122)

Ravana now directed his dreadful missiles at Nila. Nila jumped on to the armoured car of Ravana. Ravana warned Nila: "Get away before I shoot you." Shot by Ravana, Nila fell down; but by the grace of his god-father or guardian angel, he did not die.

Abandoning him, Ravana now turned to Laksmana who shouted at him: "Why do you waste your prowess on the vanaras; come and show me your valour!" Ravana replied in great anger: "Gladly, O Laksmana, and I shall let you taste the fury of my fire." Laksmana taunted Ravana: "Heroes do not brag, O King! And you who are the worst among sinners are keen only on boasting!" Ravana replied by shooting seven missiles. Laksmana responded suitably. Whatever missile one used, the other neutralised it and replied with a more powerful missile. Ravana took an extremely deadly weapon (said to have belonged to the Creator himself) and struck Laksmana. For a moment Laksmana's head reeled. Regaining his consciousness, Laksmana hit Ravana with three deadly missiles. This made Ravana swoon for a while. Recovering from the swoon, Ravana hit Laksmana with an even more

deadly weapon, a javelin of inestimable destructive power. Struck by it, Laksmana fell down. Ravana tried to lift him presumably to carry him away: but Laksmana's body became so heavy that Ravana could not lift it. Hanuman challenged Ravana, and hit Ravana so hard that the demon vomited blood and lost his consciousness for a while. Hanuman quickly lifted Laksmana's body and carried it away, which became light on account of Hanuman's love for him. Laksmana contemplated upon the truth that he was a part of the Lord himself and this healed his wounds and enabled him to regain his consciousness soon.

Rama came forward to fight Ravana. Hanuman prayed to Rama: "I beg of you to be seated on my shoulders and fight the demon." Rama consented to this. He said to Ravana: "Stand, O demon: having offended me, you cannot find asylum anywhere. Remember that single-handed I killed thousands of your warriors. When he regains consciousness, Laksmana himself will kill you and your family and followers." Infuriated by these words, Ravana hit Hanuman with several flaming missiles. Hanuman did not mind them, and his strength and enthusiasm grew. Rama thereupon aimed a missile at Ravana. Hit by it, Ravana who could not be shaken by even Indra's thunderbolt, shook violently and dropped his weapon. With another missile Rama knocked Ravana's diadem down. Seeing Ravana in a wretched condition, Rama graciously said: "You have really shown great strength and skill, O Ravana; I can see you are tired and wounded; go home, rest and recuperate; when you return to the battlefield you will witness my strength and power.

Crestfallen, Ravana entered Lanka

Sapto 'ham vedavatya ca yada sa dharṣita pura

se 'yam sita mahabhaga jata janaka nandini (11)

Doubt, dejection and despair overcame Ravana. He sat on his throne in his court and said: "Alas, I have been defeated by a mere mortal! I remember now Brahma's terrible words, 'Your danger is from mortals'. King Anaranya of the Iksvaku dynasty cursed me that a descendant of his would kill me. I recall, too, the curse of Vedavati when I violated her: surely she has taken birth as Sita. Goddess Uma had cursed me that my death would result from a woman. These cannot but come true. Yet, guard the city gates well. Awaken Kumbhakarna, for he alone is capable of fighting these heroes, our

enemies. He usually sleeps for nine, ten or eight months. And, he has gone to sleep only nine days ago, after our consultations. Wake him up; for only he can deal with our enemies."

The demons collected a lot of food, drink, perfumes and other articles which Kumbhakarna liked most. They entered the subterranean palace paved with jewels and gold, where Kumbha- karna slept for an unnaturally long period of time. He had a colossal form. When he exhaled, the air blew people away from him.

They blew their conches and beat their drums. They pushed his body and roared. They even struck that enormous body with clubs and maces, nay even other deadly weapons. The whole city resounded with this noise and the inhabitants and birds and beasts were frightened; Kumbhakarna did not wake up. Then they made a thousand elephants trample on his body; this annoyance woke him up. At once he felt the pangs of hunger. Yawning, opening his terrible mouth, he awoke. The demons directed his attention to the pile of food. When he was satisfied, they worshipped him. He asked them, why they had awakened him, and what urgent business the king had. They briefly described the war and the defeat suffered by the royal forces, and concluded: "What even the gods, and the demons could not do, that has been done by Rama; and by him the king was spared out of compassion as it were." Springing up from his bed, Kumbhakarna roared: "I shall immediately proceed to the battlefield and destroy the vanara forces as also Rama and Laksmana, and only then shall I go to see the king. I shall please the demons by providing them with a rich repast of the meat and blood of the vanaras; and I shall myself drink the blood of Rama and Laksmana." The demons, how- ever, suggested that he should first hold consultation with the king, Ravana and only then do what was appropriate.

On the instructions of Ravana, the demons politely invited Kumbhakarna to the king's court. After washing his face and having a drink, Kumbhakarna walked towards the palace. Seeing this gigantic demon striding the earth, the vanaras got the fright of their lives.

sarva ksapita košam ca sa tvam abhyavapadya mam

trayasve 'mam purim lankam bala vṛddha 'vasesitam (62.19)

Rama saw the terrible-looking Kumbhakarna walking the earth as if he were a cosmic person. He asked Vibhisapa: "Pray, Vibhisapa, tell who this is. Is he a demon or a goblin? I have never seen anything like this till now."

In reply, Vibhisapa told Rama the biography of Kumbhakarna: "He is Kumbhakarna, son of the renowned sage Visrava. He has defeated in war all the gods, demi-gods and demons. Even as a baby he devoured thousands of living beings. Indra himself defended the living beings and hit Kumbhakarna with a thunderbolt. He not only did not die but he pulled out the tusk of Indra's own elephant and hit Indra with it! The gods and Indra thereupon appealed to Brahma, the creator, who was shocked by this misdeed of one of his great-grandsons. Brahma cursed him: 'No doubt, you are born of Paulastya's son for the destruction of the world; before you can destroy the world, may you enter into perpetual sleep. Kumbhakarna appealed to Ravana who pleaded with Brahma on his behalf. He said: 'It is not right that you should thus curse your own great-grandson. Yet, your curse can- not be falsified. Pray, modify it by stipulating the period for which he would sleep at a time. Brahma said: 'He will sleep continuously for a period of six months, and then shall be awake for a day during which he will be ravenously hungry." I think having been defeated by you, Ravana has awakened Kumbhakarna. After merely seeing him at a distance, the vanaras have fled in terror. I doubt if they would be able to face him on the battlefield. I therefore suggest a ruse: have it announced that this is just a mechanical device and is not a living being, and that should restore confidence to the vanaras."

Pleased with this account, Rama instructed the commander- in-chief to ensure that the entire army was alert!

At the same time, Kumbhakarna walked into the presence of the mighty Ravana. Ravana rose from his seat and showed extra- ordinary love, respect and affection for his brother Kumbhakarna, who asked: "What can I do for you, and for what have I been awakened with such effort?" Ravana lifted him up and gave a place next to himself, and said: "O brother, you have slept for a long time. In the meantime, our enemy Rama managed to cross the sea and has actually besieged Lanka. You can see for your- self that the whole of Lanka has been transformed into a sea of We have tried to fight with them. But only you can vanaras! deal with them. It is for this purpose that we woke you up. Our treasury is empty and our resources are at a low ebb:

pray, save Lanka which only has children and aged ones left! I am sure you realise that I have never before asked for such a favour; pray, do this for the sake of your brother! You are our only hope; you are our last resort. No one is equal to you in strength in the whole world. If you enter the battlefield, the (See note, appendix) enemy forces will vanish like an autumnal cloud when a gale blows."

asmin kale tu yad yukttam tad idanim vidhiyatam

gatam tu na 'nusocanti gatam tu gatam eva hi (63.25)

Kumbhakarna laughed aloud hearing Ravana's plea, and said: "I told you so! You indulged in an action, ignoring its obvious consequences, and without seeking our advice and help. One should certainly seek dharma, prosperity and pleasure, but each in its own time and place. Having consulted with his ministers a king who resorts to negotiation, giving presents, dissension or even a show of strength, and who seeks dharma, prosperity and pleasure with due regard to time and place, does not come to grief, O King. Yet, again, not every one can advise a king. There are unwise people who are ignorant of the scriptures, and who are really no better than beasts but who come forward to counsel a king, on account of greed or insolence. To follow their counsel would bring disaster in its train. Sometimes, the ministers might overtly or covertly enter into an alliance with an enemy and encourage the king to indulge in wrong action: the wise king should beware of them. Surely, the best thing for you to do was pointed out by me and by Vibhisana: restore Sita to Rama."

Ravana was impatient with this sermon. He angrily replied: "Why do you preach as if you were my guru or father? Let us consider what should be done now; the past is past and it is no use worrying over it. Even if I have done something wrong, you can nullify the consequences by your prowess."

Kumbhakarna jumped up: "Fear not. Despair not. I advised you out of brotherly affection. However, you will witness my strength again today. I shall avenge the death of our heroes. I shall wipe the tears of the bereaved. Command: I shall go immediately and destroy your enemies. I can break up the earth; I can shake the firmament and create disorder in the heavens. Enjoy and be cheerful. Consider that Rama is dead, and sita is yours."

The counsellor Mahodara intervened and said to Kumbhakarna: "You are vain and ignorant. Both the virtuous and the vicious enjoy life in this world; enjoyment of pleasure alone is worthy of pursuit. The king is right in wishing to enjoy life with Sita. Further, I do not consider that your physical power will be of any avail before Rama." He turned to Ravana: "You have abducted Sita and brought her here; the important thing now is to enjoy her, to persuade her to submit to your desire. I have a nice plot. Spread word that Kumbhakarna along with a couple of commanders and myself have gone to fight with Rama. If we succeed, it is all right. If we do not, we shall return to you with Rama's missiles, clearly marked on our bodies. Spread the rumour then that we have eaten Rama. When the rumour that we have eaten Rama spreads, Sita will hear it and give up her hope; at the same time, try to win her favour by secretly approaching her with presents and jewels and other temptations. Wise people in this world achieve their desired ends without even giving a battle!"

kṛtam nah kadanam ghoram kumbhakarnena raksasa

na sthana kalo gacchamo dayitam jivitam hi nah (66.30)

Kumbhakarna derided Mahodara for his cowardly suggestion. He said: "Cowardly ministers ruin a king's fortunes by shying away from a good fight, and by blindly assenting to all his whims."

Ravana highly applauded Kumbhakarna's words. Kumbhakarna grabbed a trident and was ready to go to war, all alone. But Ravana counselled: "Take the army with you, Ó hero! For the vanaras are powerful and their determination augments their power. If they find someone alone or unguarded, they might overcome him." Further to show his affection, appreciation and hope and conviction, Ravana embraced Kumbhakarna, placed gold necklaces studded with gems around his neck and even respectfully bowed down to him, his younger brother. Kumbhakarna dressed himself for the battle; he put on a pure gold armour which was unassailable. Covered with jewels on all his limbs, holding the blazing trident in his hand, Kumbhakarna looked verily like lord Narayana.

Followed by mighty heroes with their armies, Kumbhakarna set out to go to the battlefield. He was fierce even to look at. His body was colossal; and his flaming eyes looked like the wheels of a car. He roared aloud: "I shall make a good meal of all the vanaras; I shall kill Rama himself, who is the source

of the vanaras' strength." Unmistakable evil omens appeared, but they did not deter him.

The vanaras fled in panic when they saw him. Angada tried to reason with the leaders of the vanaras, and persuade them not to flee. He said: "This demon may be powerful; but he cannot face our Rama, for no one can!" The vanaras returned. They at- tacked Kumbhakarna. But he ruthlessly crushed them. The rocks and mountain-peaks they threw at him broke on striking him! When struck by him playfully, they ran along the route by which they had entered Lanka. Some vanaras were drowned, others disappeared into the forests, and yet others took shelter in caves.

Angada appealed to them again and again: "Why are you running, O vanaras? Even your wives will laugh at you in contempt if you run away from the battlefield. Noble vanaras though you are, you behave as if you were uncultured beings, greatly agitated by fear. If it is time for us to die, let us give up our lives here. If we win the battle, we shall enjoy on this earth; if we lose our lives, we shall reach the highest heaven! But I assure you: Kumbhakarna cannot escape death at Rama's hands. "But the vanaras replied: "Kumbhakarna has devastated our forces: this is not the time to stand up and fight, we should leave. Our lives are indeed dear to us." However, Angada was able to persuade them to return to the battlefield.

praksiptah kumbhakarnena vaktre patala samnibhe

nasaputabhyam nirjagmuh karnabhyam cai 'va vanarah (36)

Once again the vanaras attacked Kumbhakarna. In a very short time, eight thousand and seven hundred vanaras had fallen at his hands. Hanuman was severely wounded by Kumbhakarna's trident. He vomited blood and was dazed.

Nila managed to inspire the vanaras with confidence. The vanaras, finding Kumbhakarna standing in front of them like a mountain, ascended that mountain, and began to bite him. Kumbhakarna caught hold of these vanaras and put them into his mouth, intent upon swallowing them. But, they cleverly escaped through his nostrils and his ears. However, Kumbhakarna continued to eat the vanaras, and kill them ruthlessly.

The vanaras appealed to Rama for help. And, Angada rushed to their relief. Angada picked up a mountain-peak and threw it at Kumbhakarna. Enraged

at this, Kumbhakarna hurled his trident at Angada. Angada dodged it, and in retaliation hit the demon on his chest. The demon fainted! On recovering, the demon clenched his fist and struck Angada with all his might: Angada became unconscious.

Then Kumbhakarna turned towards Sugriva. Picking up a mountain-peak, Sugriva challenged Kumbhakarna: "Leave the vanara warriors alone: look what I do to you now!" But that rock broke into pieces as it hit Kumbhakarna's chest. The demon hurled his trident at Sugriva. But Hanuman intercepted it, caught hold of it, calmly placed it on his knee and broke it! Kumbhakarna was amazed, surprised and enraged at this extraordinary feat of Hanuman. He broke loose a huge rock and hit Sugriva with it. Sugriva became unconscious. Kumbhakarna walked towards where Sugriva had fallen, picked him up, tucked him into his own arm- pit and walked towards Lanka. He knew that with Sugriva out of the way, all the others, including Rama and Laksmana would surrender.

Hanuman reflected: "What shall I do now? I can assume gigantic proportions through my own supernatural powers and kill this Kumbhakarna and rescue Sugriva. But, Sugriva’s reputation would thereby suffer and he may not like being rescued by me. I shall await further developments, and in the meantime restore morale to the vanara forces." Soon Sugriva regained consciousness and realised his predicament! After careful consideration, he bit off Kumbhakarna's ears and nose! Surprised thus by Sugriva, sorely afflicted with pain, Kumbhakarna dashed Sugriva down. The vanara hero sprang up at once and immediately returned to where Rama was, thus foiling the demon's plot. Dripping with blood, Kumbhakarna once again advanced towards the enemy.

sa tasya bahur giri Srigakalpah samudgaro raghava baṇa kṛttah

papata tasmin harirajasainye jaghana tam vanara vahinim ca (169)

Kumbhakarna took hold of a mallet and rushed into the midst of the vanara army. Laksmana shot a number of missiles at the demon who evaded them without any difficulty. Laksmana literal- ly covered the demon with his missiles: but unaffected by these the demon said to Laksmana: "I thoroughly appreciate your skill, O Laksmana! For, no one has so far dared to oppose me: Even Indra was once routed by me. That you challenged me makes me

respect you as a soldier. But I wish to kill Rama alone: when he is dead, it will be the end!"

As Kumbhakarna rushed towards Rama, the latter discharged a dreadful missile endowed with the power of Rudra, the god of destruction, and defying his powerful armour, the missile went right through to his heart. The shock was so great that his weapons fell from his hands. Yet, he ran wild, swallowing the vanaras. Kumbhakarna hurled another mountain-peak which looked terrible: Rama broke that up, too, with his missiles -- and its fragments fell on two hundred monkeys. Laksmana understood the demon's nature and suggested to Rama "The smell of blood intoxicates the demon. And so he runs amok and kills the vanaras, though that is not his aim. Let the vanaras climb upon him and save others." The vanaras climbed upon his body. But he shook them down!

Rama said to Kumbhakarna: "I am the destroyer of demons, O Kumbhakarna; and your death is at hand!" Kumbhakarna laughed aloud and replied: "I am not Viradha, Kabandha, Khara, Vali nor Marica! I am Kumbhakarna, O Rama! Fight with me. I shall see how powerful you are: and then I shall swallow you, too."

Rama directed at him the same type of missiles which had instantly killed Vali, but they had no effect on the demon. Holding his iron club aloft, Kumbhakarna rushed towards Rama who discharged the 'wind' missile at the demon: it cut off the upraised arm which fell, along with the iron club, and killed a great many warriors! With his other arm, Kumbhakarna uprooted a big tree and rushed towards Rama who let fly another missile which severed that arm, too. Roaring aloud, Kumbhakarna rushed towards Rama. Taking up two crescent-shaped missiles, Rama cut off both his legs. As the legs fell, the sound of their fall reverberated throughout Lanka. Without arms, and without legs, Kumbhakarna was yet able to propel himself, and came rushing to- wards Rama with his mouth open. Rama gagged him with another missile. With yet another missile, Rama cut off his head, even as Indra had cut off the head of the demon Vrtra in days of yore. As that huge head fell, it rolled and bulldozed a number of buildings in the neighbourhood. Thus the enemy of holy men and gods had been killed by Rama, and they rejoiced exceedingly.

tasya 'yam karmanah prapto vipako mama šokadah

yan maya dharmikah sriman sa nirasto vibhisanah (68.23)

The demons reported to Ravana: "The mighty Kumbhakarna who was the terror even of the gods has been deprived of his life by Rama's missile!" Hearing that the mighty Kumbhakarna had been slain on the battlefield, Ravana was consumed by grief, lost his balance and fell down. And the sons of Ravana wailed aloud. So did Ravana's other brothers. Regaining conscious- ness, Ravana lamented: "Alas, why have you abandoned me and gone away, my brother Kumbhakarna. How was it possible, I wonder, that even you could be defeated and slain in battle? What will I do even if I gain Sita's favour now? Life is barren for me, now that you, O Kumbhakarna, have gone. I ridiculed Vibhişana and lost him; and now I have lost you, too: for whom shall I live now? Ah, it is certain that my wicked action in not listening to the wise counsel of Vibhishana has borne fruit."

While he was thus lamenting, Ravana's son Trisira tried to console the demon-king: "Undoubtedly, Kumbhakarna was mighty. And it is true that such a mighty warrior has been killed by this human being Rama. But, that is surely no reason why you should lose heart! You have various weapons which the creator Brahma himself has bestowed upon you. And, we are here, too. Stay in Lanka, Father; and I shall go to the battlefield and kill your enemies." This revived Ravana's hopes.

With Ravana's blessings, his four sons (Trisira, Devantaka, Narantaka and Atikaya) and his two brothers Mahaparšva, and Mahodara, set out for the battlefield, taking with them their choicest weapons. Surrounded by their own armed forces, they looked formidable and invincible. They were desperate and they were determined either to win or to die on the field.

Narantaka ploughed into the vanara-army. On the path of his advance, the vanaras fell like flies. Wielding the flaming lance, Narantaka burnt the vanaras. The vanaras were struck with fear. They sought Sugriva's protection. Sugriva commissioned Angada to deal with the new menace. Angada challenged Narantaka: "Leave the common vanaras alone, O demon. Here I bare my chest: try the strength of your lance on it!" Annoyed by this challenge, Narantaka hurled the lance at Angada's chest: it broke! Angada struck Narantaka's vehicle with his palm; it sank into the earth. Narantaka brought his powerful fist to bear upon Angada's skull and broke it! Unmindful of the profuse bleeding caused by this, Angada hit the

demon's chest with his clenched fist. His chest broken by this hit, Narantaka fell, vomiting warm blood.

sa tribhir nairṛta Sresthair yugapat samabhidrutah

na vivyathe mahateja valiputrah pratapavan (12)

Narantaka's brothers, Devantaka and Trišira and Mahodara, simultaneously attacked Angada. Angada picked up a huge tree and hurled it at Devantaka. But Trišira intervened and cut that tree down. In this battle, while Mahodara intercepted Angada's missiles, Trisira viciously attacked angada. Though he was thus simultaneously attacked by three powerful demons, Angada was not disheartened.

With a single blow, Angada killed Mahodara's elephant. Pulling out its tusk, he hit Devantaka. The demon returned the blow. At the same time Trisira also directed his missiles at angada. Finding him thus ill-matched, Hanuman and Nila joined him. Nila thereafter engaged Trisira.

Devantaka fought with Hanuman. Rushing towards Devantaka, Hanuman dealt such a deadly blow on his head that Devantaka's skull was shattered, and he fell dead.

While Nila was fighting with Trisira, Mahodara also began to attack the former. For a moment Nila found himself paralysed. But regaining his strength, he hit Mahodara with a big rock. Mahodara fell. Angered by this, Trisira directed his missiles at Hanuman. Hanuman hurled a mountain-peak at Trisira but the latter broke it up into pieces. Hanuman incapacitated Trisira's horse. Trišira threw his powerful javelin at Hanuman who caught hold of it and broke it. Trisira then used his sword and severely wounded Hanuman. Hanuman slapped the demon on his chest. He fell. Hanuman wrested the sword from the demon.Tri- sira struck Hanuman once again. Hanuman cut off Trisira's head with his own sword.

After these, the mighty demon Mahaparsva came forward to fight. He wielded a glittering mace which was flaming all the time. With it he had conquered many gods and demi-gods. Wield- ing this mace, Mahaparsva threw the vanaras into an utter con- fusion. Risabha came forward to fight with Mahaparsva. The demon hit Risabha on his chest; and the vanara's chest actually broke and blood poured from it. Regaining his strength after a little while, the vanara Risabha hit the demon on his chest. The demon fell

down. Risabha pounced upon the demon and wrested the mace from his hand. Mahaparsva got up after a few minutes and delivered a terrible blow on Risabha who fell down and remained unconscious for some time. Getting up later, Risabha struck the demon who dashed towards the vanara in an effort to retrieve the mace. However, before he could do so, Risabha killed Mahaparsva with his own mace! and the demon fell down. The demon-forces began to flee.

balo 'yam iti vijñaya na ma 'vajñatum arhasi

balo va yadi va vṛddho mrtyum janihi samyuge (63)

Another son of Ravana, atikaya, proceeded to the battlefield, in an armoured car which shone like a thousand suns.Some of the vanaras imagined that it was Kumbhakarna who had risen from the dead, and fled. Rama questioned Vibhisana: "Who is this colossal demon, O Vibhisana? and look at his armoured car! It has gun turrets all over it, pointing in all directions. It has four drivers, twenty magazines, ten gun turrets, and it thunders like a cloud as it moves along. It is further defended by two gleaming swords. Who is this mighty demon?" Vibhisapa said: "He is atikaya, a son of Ravana. He too is free from fear of death at the hands of gods and demons, by virtue of a boon granted by Brahma. O Rama, be vigilant and get rid of him soon.

Some of the vanara leaders threw rocks and trees at him; but he dealt with them all playfully. He would himself not strike anyone who was not attacking him. He went straight to Rama and challenged him for a fight. Laksmana responded at once. When Laksmana readied his weapon, the terrible sound that it produced astonished and pleased Atikaya.Yet, he said to Laks-mana: "You are but a young boy, O Laksmana! Why do you wish to provoke me to kill you?" Laksmana retorted: "Do not boast, O demon! And, do not treat me lightly considering me to be a boy; whether I am a boy or an aged man, I am still your death!"

Laksmana aimed a powerful missile at the demon who neutralised it. In the same way, Laksmana neutralised the demon's mis- Next, Laksmana aimed a flat missile and shot the demon on his forehead: it went home and severely injured the demon siles. Laksmana, that was excellent!" atikaya shot who said: "ah, Laksmana, Laksmana with a terribly sharp missile which hit the latter's chest and made him bleed profusely. Recovering from it, Lakşmana let go a terrible missile dedicated to the god of fire; seeing this, Atikaya

intercepted it with the missile dedicated to the sun-god. Both these missiles met in space and got burnt out completely. In the same way, one intercepted the missile that the other used. Even when Laksmana managed to hit the demon, the missiles proved incapable of piercing his armour, studded with diamonds. Atikaya directed a missile at Laksmana which had a zigzag course. Hit by it, Laksmana fainted for a while. When he regained consciousness, he heard a voice say: "These conventional weapons cannot kill him, O Laksmana: use the most powerful one, the Brahma-missile." Thereupon, Laksmana used the Brahma-missile. As it was delivered from his weapon, the son and the moon were obscured and the earth shook. Atikaya tried to intercept it. But, the Brahma-missile severed his head.

yasya vikramam asadya raksasa nidhanam gatah

tam manye raghavam viram narayanam anamayam (72.11)

Ravana's anxiety mounted to hear of atikaya's fall. He said to his counsellors: "Many of our people whom we had regarded as invincible have been killed by Rama and Laksmana. When they were assailed by missiles which had the power of the creator Brahma himself, they somehow extricated themselves from them. This indeed puzzles me. I think Rama, by whose prowess the mighty demons have been killed, is Narayana himself. Hence, I feel it is essential that the greatest vigilance should be exercised by all of you. Let the city be guarded with unwinking vigilance; be especially mindful of the movements of the vanaras."

Ravana's son Indrajit approached him and said: "Why do you feel depressed, O Father, while I am by your side ready to kill your enemies. Give me leave to go to the battlefield; and I promise I shall kill all of them, including Rama and Laksmana." Indrajit at once got ready to go the battlefield. Indrajit performed a fire-worship, for the success of his mission. And, the god of fire himself appeared in person to receive the offerings. There were auspicious omens, too.

While Indrajit got ready the mightiest missile which had the power of the creator Brahma, the whole world shook. He himself remained hidden, and provided cover for the demons who at- tacked the vanaras vigorously. The vanaras detected Indrajit's position in the sky and threw trees and rocks at him. But this only enraged him still further and made him attack the vanaras more viciously. He himself secured direct hits on the foremost among the

vanara heroes: Gandhamadana, Nala, Mainda, Gaja, Jambavan, Nila, and even Sugriva, Risabha, Dvivida and Angada had been seriously wounded by Indrajit. Remaining unseen by others, Indrajit flew over the vanara-forces, carefully avoiding his own armies, and showered bombs upon the vanaras. Indrajit released a shower of a variety of bombs--resembling pikes, swords and axes-- all of them descending upon the vanaras, burning brightly and sending a shower of sparks all round, which ignited all that came into contact with them. Any vanara who dared to look up at this phenomenon had his eyes blinded or put out by the sparks and the missiles. Indrajit then turned his attention up- on Rama and Laksmana and covered them with his fire. Rama said to Laksmana: "Surely, Indrajit is employing the missile dedicated to Brahma the creator himself: its power is inviolable. Let us endure this calamity patiently for a little while. When all of us are injured, Indrajit will surely return to Lanka."

And so did he! When Indrajit saw that by his fire-power all the vanara leaders and even Rama and Laksmana had fallen upon the ground, he flew back to Lanka and reported to Ravana.

sarve visalya virujah ksanena haripravira nihatas ca ye syuh

gandhena tasam pravarausadhinam supta nišanteşy iva samprabuddhah (74)

During that single day six million and seven hundred thousand vanaras had been slain by Indrajit, with the missile endowed with the power of nature. Vibhisana and Hanuman went round the battlefield. They saw Jambavan iying wounded. Vibhisana questioned him: "O mighty one, are you still alive, and how do you feel?" Jambavan replied: "I cannot see, but from your voice I believe you are Vibhisana. Pray, tell me at once, is Hanuman still alive?" Vibhisana was intrigued, and asked: "Why do you ask about Hanuman even before you enquire of Rama and Laksmana?" Jambavan replied: "For a very good reason, O Vibhisana: If Hanuman is alive, then our survival is possible." Hanuman himself then spoke to Jambavan who was highly pleased and said: "It is time for you to show your supernormal power, O mighty hero! You can revive Rama, Laksmana and all the wounded vanaras: and no one else can do it. Proceed immediately to the foremost mountain covered with ice. Between the Ṛsabha and the Kailasa mountains you will see a blazing mountain of herbs. There you will find the four herbs, mrtasanjivani (which revives the dead), visalyakarani (which

heals all wounds), suvarnakarani (which restores the glow of the body to its original state), and bandhani (which heals fractures of bones). Bring these with the greatest expedition."

Hanuman lost no time in leaving on this life-saving expedition. He took off with a mighty roar which struck terror in the hearts of the demons of Lanka. With its tail held aloft, lowering its back, pulling back its 'ears, and opening its mouth, Hanuman's aircraft blazed like fire and took to the air with a great roar. Soon, he had reached the place described by Jambavan. He saw the hermitages of the sages. He saw the seat of the Creator, the abode of fire, that of the god of wealth, the light of the sun, and he saw the weapon of cosmic destruction, and the very navel of the earth. He saw the Rsabha and the Kailasa mountains. He also saw between them radiant herbs. But, when he landed to collect them, he could not see them. Distressed and puzzled, Hanuman thought for a moment and came to a decision! He thought: "Since I cannot see the herbs, I shall up- root the whole hill and carry it away." and uprooting the whole hill, Hanuman was airborne again. Soon he was back in Lanka.

As soon as he landed on the battlefield, by merely inhaling the healing air that wafted from the hill of herbs, Rama, Laksmana and the millions of wounded vanaras were restored to perfect health. Alas for the demons, Ravana had decreed that the dead ones should be thrown into the ocean so that the casual- ties might not be known! Hanuman returned the hill to its original site.

lankayaṁ dahyamanayam susubhe sa maharnavah

chaya samsaktta salilo lohitoda iva 'rnavah (29)

Sugriva said: "Now that Kumbhakarga is dead and even so the sons of Ravana have been killed, Lanka's defences have been shattered. Let us carry out an immediate incendiary attack." The vanaras broke into the city. They set fire to whatever they saw. They set fire to the gates and to the huge mansions. The jewels that adorned the gates and the walls crumbled to the earth. Garments and ornaments were burnt. Fire destroyed the weapons of the warriors, and the saddles of the horses. Tens of thousands of the houses in Lanka were reduced to ashes, with all their secret doors, and gates and protective walls, with all their luxurious furniture. Beautiful women who were a- sleep in their houses were awakened by the crackling of the fire, and

they ran out screaming with fear. The fire that consumed Lanka was reflected on the surface of the ocean and made it look as though the water had turned red.

As the incendiary bombs showered upon the city, the stables were shattered. Horses and elephants ran amok frightening one another.

Rama and Laksmana who had regained their health and strength, fully took up their weapons and led the invasion. The boom of their weapons struck terror into the hearts of the de- Their missiles shattered the gates of the city. However, when the missiles of Rama rained fire on top of the mansions of the demons of Lanka, they became furious. Sugriva commanded the vanaras to enter the city, and warned: "anyone who turns his back or slackens his effort, should be shot by others for the guilt of disobeying the king.

When Ravana saw that the vanaras and Rama were invading the city of Lanka, he became furious. He commanded mighty heroes Kumbha and Nikumbha, Yupaksa, Sonitaksa, Prajangha and Kampana, to stem the tide of the invasion: With their ornaments and their weapons gleaming in the moonlight, and radiating great splendour, these mighty heroes marched forward to meet the vanara forces. A terrible battle ensued, between the vanaras and the demons.

Angada challenged Kampana. The latter hit Angada with a mace. Though hurt severely, Angada managed to hold himself and to pick up a mountain-peak and hurl it on Kampana. The demon was dead.

Sonitaksa challenged angada, and showered a variety of missiles upon angada. The vanara hero however survived all these and attacked the demon's car. Sonitaksa jumped to the ground and a hand-to-hand fight ensued in which Angada dug his sword deep into the body of the demon who fell unconscious.

upalambha bhayac ca 'pi na 'si vira maya hatah

krta karma parisranto visrantah pasya me balam (79)

When Sonitaksa became unconscious, Angada, still brandishing his sword went round looking for someone else to challenge. At the same time Prajangha and Yupakşa were coming towards Angada, Sonitaksa, too, had recovered in the meantime and he joined them. At the same time Mainda and Dvivida came to the help of Angada. The three vanara heroes fighting

with the three demons was a hair-raising spectacle. They fought with trees, rocks and missiles for some time. Prajangha clenched his own fist and wished to strike Angada. At the same time, Sonitaksa struck Angada on the forehead, which made him fall down. Getting up soon, Angada knocked Prajangha's head off with his fist.

Yupaksa picked up Prajangha's sword and began to fight. Dvivida caught hold of Yupaksa; Sonitaksa struck Dvivida in defence of Yupaksa. Dvivida snatched Sonitaksa's mace. Mainda came to the help of Dvivida and struck Yapakṣa. After a fierce fight, Dvivida tore the face of Sonitaksa and throwing him on the ground, crushed him. Mainda gripped Yupaksa in his arms and crushed him; he fell down dead.

The demons moved to where Kumbhakarna's son Kumbha was. Kumbha was of extraordinary strength and had supernatural powers. He surprised Dvivida by aiming a missile at him. Dvivida fell down, writhing in agony. Mainda rushed to his aid and hurled a rock at Kumbha who broke it with his missile. Hurt by Kumbha's missile, Mainda fell unconscious on the field. Similar- ly, Kumbha attacked Angada, too, with his terrible missiles. However, Angada remained unshaken. Angada hurled huge rocks on Kumbha which he broke up with his missiles, and then shot Angada on his eyebrows. Unmindful of the bleeding and the pain, Angada continued to fight. When however Kumbha shot seven missiles simultaneously at him, Angada fainted. Sugriva himself joined the battle.

Rushing fearlessly towards Kumbha, Sugriva wrested Kumbha's weapon from his hand and broke it. Thereupon he said to Kumbha: "Ravana's strength is the fruit of a boon he obtained from Brahma; your father Kumbhakarna was strong by nature. You are equal in valour to your father, and to Ravana. Surely, you have already exhibited some of your great strength by striking the vanara heroes down. You are fatigued. Rest awhile and come back; then I shall show you my strength. I do not wish to incur Kumbha was en- ignominy by striking you when you are tired."" raged to hear this and attacked Sugriva. The latter picked the demon up and threw him into the sea! Kumbha returned and landed a terrible blow on Sugriva's chest which broke his armour and even his bones! It generated sparks of fire! Sugriva clenched his fist and struck the demon's chest. Hit by Sugriva, the demon fell dead; the earth shook; and the demons were filled with fear.

parigrhya ca bahubhyaṁ parivṛtya ŝirodharaṁ

utpatayamasa siro bhairavam nadato mahat (77.23)

When Kumbha_was killed, his brother Nikumbha rushed forward towards Sugriva and stood gazing at him, consuming him with anger. Nikumbha had a weapon, a club (parigha). It was gold- plated and diamond-studded. When the demon wielded it, the winds that constituted the atmosphere of the earth got agitated. The club itself shone like a smokeless flame. In fact, when the club was wielded by the demon, it looked as if the whole sky with the heavenly bodies revolved around it.

But, Hanuman stepped in front of Nikumbha, bared his chest, and sought a fight. Nikumbha hit Hanuman with the club; lo and behold, the club broke into pieces. Hanuman struck the demon with his clenched fist, and this broke his armour and blood flowed from his chest. Steadying himself after this blow, the demon caught hold of Hanuman and carried him away! After a while, however, Hanuman released himself from the demon's grip, stood on the ground, struck Nikumbha down, crushed him, and sitting on his chest twisted the demon's neck. He was dead.

Ravana flew into a rage. He summoned Makaraksa, the son of Khara, and quickly despatched him to the battlefield. Followed by a huge army, Makaraksa went to the battlefield. There were many evil omens; but the demon ignored them.

When the vanaras were harassed by the demons, Rama himself came to their aid. But, Makaraksa addressed Rama and said: "Wait, you shall fight with me, not with these warriors. From the day I heard of your killing my father, I have been waiting for this opportunity. Fight with whatever strength you have, whatever missiles you have, or with your own arms." Rama laughed at this boast and replied: "Victory in war is not won by vain boasting, O demon! That day the birds and the beasts of the forest had their hunger satisfied by the flesh of fourteen thousand demons and that of your father. They will have another feast today."

A terrible fight ensued. The demon's missiles were effectively intercepted by Rama's counter-missiles. The sound that arose from the weapons filled the atmosphere, like the rumbling of clouds. Gods and the celestials witnessed this battle. Rama and Makarakşa hit each other with the most

powerful missiles; yet, neither flagged. The fire was so intense and so constant that the ground was completely obscured. Rama knocked down the demon's weapon. The demon jumped on the ground and brandished his flaming trident. He hurled it at Rama who intercepted it while it was still in the air. The demon rushed towards Rama. The latter aimed at him the missile dedicated to the god of fire. His heart pierced by it, the demon fell dead. Witnessing the death of Makaraksa, the demons fled to Lanka city, afraid of the weapon of Rama.

ayudhyamanam pracchannam pranjalim Sarapagatam

palayantam pramattam va na tvam hantum iha 'rhasi (80.39)

Ravana was beside himself with anger. He looked at his son Indrajit and said: "My beloved son, by your might, you have conquered even the king of heaven; is it difficult for you to kill these two humans in battle? Go and by whatever means kill them." Indrajit once again performed the religious rites connected with war, for his success in the venture. On conclusion of this religious rite, Indrajit ascended an aircraft which could go out of sight. And, he took with him the missile dedicated to the Creator. As soon as he emerged from the city, he became invisible. From high above in the sky, he directed his fire at Rama and Laksmana. However, though they directed their fire at the demon, remaining unseen in the sky, they could not reach him. And, the demon had effectively hidden himself behind a smoke-screen. Though he moved about constantly, he could neither be seen nor his aircraft heard. Indrajit continued to score direct hits on Rama and Laksmana; and once Rama's missile scored a direct hit on Indrajit.

Seeing this, Laksmana said to Rama: "I shall direct the missile presided over by the Creator at this demon, Rama; and that will be his end. I cannot see what else we can do at this juncture." Rama, however, did not approve of this action; he said: "You cannot kill all the demons for the sake of one of them, O Laksmana. You should not kill in battle one who does not fight, who is hidden, who comes to you with joined palms, one who seeks your asylum, one who is running away, or one who is dazed. I shall deal with him with a single powerful missile."

Indrajit returned to Lanka. He came back to the battle- field, but this time in an armoured car and with sita in it -- a lifelike and exact replica of the real Sita produced by his magic. The vanaras rushed towards him in great anger

when they saw him. Hanuman saw him, too: and he saw Sita seated in the car, a picture of grief and despair. While the vanaras were looking, Indrajit drew his sword and caught hold of the hair on Sita's head. She wailed aloud: "O Rama, O Rama."

Hanuman upbraided Indrajit and admonished him: "This indeed is the worst of all sins, O demon! Though you are descended from brahmana sages, you were conceived by a demoness, and hence you exhibit this unworthy trait! The killing of a woman is universally condemned." Indrajit replied: "How true! O vanara! But, in war one can do whatever might annoy the enemy. It is for her sake that you have all invaded Lanka; I shall thwart your purpose by killing her." Saying so, he cut the body of Sita into two even as the vanaras were watching. Indrajit was happy. The vanaras were grief-stricken.

uttiṣṭha narasardula dirghabaho dṛḍhavrata

kim atmanaṁ mahatmanam atmanaṁ na' vabudhyase (83.43)

The vanaras began to flee when they saw Indrajit: Hanuman tried to restore their morale. Under his leadership, they began to fight the demons again. He himself took a huge rock and threw it upon the vehicle of Indrajit; but the driver cleverly dodged it. The rock hit the ground and made a big hole in it. Fierce fighting ensued between the vanaras and the demons. How- ever, after some time, Hanuman commanded the vanara army to re- treat, tearfully saying: "Sita, for whose recovery we are fight- ing, is dead. We should report this to Rama and to Sugriva and then do as they decide." and they all did so.

At the same time, Indrajit decided that he should perform another important religious ceremony for attaining even greater power in war. He headed for a place known as Nikumbhila.

And, at the same time Rama had despatched Jambavan to help Hanuman in his combat with the demons. However, Jambavan saw that Hanuman himself was coming to where Rama was, with a face portraying unfathomable sorrow. Hanuman approached Rama and said: "O Rama, even as we were looking on and fighting, Indrajit killed the noble Sita." Hearing this, Rama fell down unconscious. Seeing this, Laksmana broke down and wailed aloud: "O Rama, if this could happen to you then surely there is no truth in the belief that happiness follows virtue. We see that the wicked

Ravana prospers whereas you who have adhered to virtue all your life have experienced nothing but unhappiness! It may be said that virtue needs the protection of strength for the attainment of its own reward which is happiness; then it is weak and one should shun such weakness, and resort to might. By renouncing your right to the throne, you have renounced strength: and hence this discomfiture. In this world only a wealthy man has friends and relations; he alone is considered a man, a pundit, a hero, intelligent, blessed and virtuous. Even dharma and enjoyment are possible only to him; and all pay homage to him. Because you have renounced wealth, and because you went to the forest to honour your father's word, your wife has been abducted!.... ah, Rama, get up. Why do you not know that you are the supreme being? I have been saying all this only to rouse your anger; however I shall myself presently destroy all these demons!"

Just then Vibhisana came there. Laksmana told him what had happened to Rama, Vibhisana then said to Rama: "Rama, I know Ravana's intentions about Sita: he would never let her be killed. This is surely a trick by Indrajit who is an adept in magic. However, he is about to perform a great religious rite; if he concludes it he will be still more powerful. Please send Laksmana with me, and we shall do the needful at once."

ayam tvam sacivaih sardham mahatma rajanicarah

abhijñas tasya desasya pṛsṭhato 'nugamisyati (85.23)

Still slightly dazed by the dreadful news of Sita's end, Rama did not clearly comprehend Vibhiṣana's words, and asked him to repeat them. And, Vibhiṣana did so. He added: "Indrajit is about to perform a dreadful rite at a place called Nikumbhila. If he completes this, he will obtain a terrible weapon known as Brahmasira. And if he gets this, we are all as good as dead. I am aware of the boon he got from Brahma the creator; it was this: 'If, before you reach Nikumbhila and before you complete the rite, someone is able to kill you, that will be your end.' Surely, therefore, now is the time, and now alone is the time to put an end to Indrajit. If he is dead, Ravana is as good as dead, too! There is no time to lose: let Lakṣmaṇa, accompanied by the army proceed immediately to Nikumbhila and he will be able to kill Indrajit."

Rama replied: "O Laksmana, go at once with the entire army and with all the vanara heroes. You can easily kill him in battle. And, Vibhişana will accompany you, and he knows all the tricks of Indrajit.

Laksmana declared: "I shall kill that terrible demon_with my missiles today." Hanuman, an army of vanaras and Vibhisana with his companions, went with him.

Vibhişana advised the vanaras: "We have nearly reached the destination. Now, use all your strength and fight these demons with stones, rocks and trees. When you thus kill the army of Indrajit, he will himself appear before us and we can then deal with him easily." The vanaras and the demons closed in on one another and there was terrible fighting. The vanaras fought furiously and most enthusiastically. Therefore thousands and thousands of the demons fell.

Seeing the destruction of the demons by the vanaras, Indrajit was agitated and he came away from the shade of the big tree, where he was performing the religious rite and which he had not concluded. He ascended his armoured car and demanded the driver to take him to where Hanuman was, eager as he was, to kill him. The demons, too, who were with Indrajit attacked Hanuman with a variety of weapons and missiles. But Hanuman stood unaffected by them. Indrajit himself saw Hanuman standing like a mountain on the battlefield. With great anger, he shot several missiles at Hanuman: but Hanuman did not wince. He said to Indrajit: "Fight me, if you are a hero, O Indrajit! Having come near me, you will not return alive."

At the same time, Vibhişana drew Laksmana's attention to the demon Indrajit and said: "He wants to kill Hanuman! Before he does so, you should engage him in battle and kill him your- self."

yah svapaksam parityajya parapaksam nişevate

sa svapakşe ksayam prapte pascat tair eva hanyate (87.16)

Vibhişana then guided Laksmana to the place where Indrajit was and where he had commenced the sacred rite. Vibhişana said to Laksmana: "If Indrajit concludes this rite, he will become invisible and he can then destroy everyone. Kill him before that." Laksmana went forth towards the demon and invited him to a duel. Indrajit saw Laksmana, and also saw Vibhisana standing near him. Addressing Vibhisana, Indrajit said: "What a shame!

You are one of us yet you are on our enemy's side. You have completely lost all sense of kinship and right judgement. Beware! He who abandons his own people and serves the enemy will, once his own people have been eliminated, be destroyed by the enemy. Disgraceful indeed is the way in which you have betrayed us."

Vibhisana replied: "Though I was born in your race, I have never shared your nature. I am opposed to unrighteousness. One attains to happiness by abandoning the kinship of one who is unrighteous and who is bent on evil. Your father is cruel, he tormented the noble sages, and he seeks to seduce another's wife. Above all, he himself threw me out of his court and his kingdom. Well, O Indrajit, your end is near."

Indrajit then said to Laksmana: "O Laksmana, you will taste my power and strength today once again. Do you not remember that it was just the other day that both you and Rama were rendered unconscious by my missiles? Today I shall complete the work." Laksmana said: "Do not boast, O hero! But show your might in action. Remaining hidden from view, you injured us. To remain hidden and fight, is not the work of a hero but that of a thief! Here I am, standing close to you: shoot!"

Indrajit, enraged by this taunt, let loose a number of his missiles. Laksmana was severely wounded. He returned the fire. The duel between the two heroes was hair-raising to watch, and tumultuous. After a time, Vibhisana saw that Indrajit's face was a bit pale, and said to Laksmana: "The demon is becoming fatigued; attack vigorously now." Laksmana used his missiles with good effect: and Indrajit was shaken a bit. But his anger revived his strength and Indrajit shot seven missiles at Laksmana, ten at Hanuman and a hundred missiles at Vibhisana.

Unmindful of this devastating attack, Laksmana aimed his missiles at Indrajit: and with them he shattered the demon's armour. Wounded and bleeding profusely, Indrajit fought on. The fight between the two mighty heroes continued unabated; and it was of unprecedented magnitude.

A considerable time went by, but the two heroes neither retreated nor did they show that they were tired.

dharmatma satyasand has ca ramo dasarathir yadi

pauruse ca 'pratidvandvah sarai 'nam jahi ravanim (90.69)

Wishing to help Laksmana and to hasten the end of Indrajit, Vibhisapa exhorted the vanaras thus: "Why are you standing and watching the duel, O vanaras? This Indrajit is the only re- maining support of Ravana. His death is the death of Ravana himself. In fact, I could myself kill Indrajit: but he is my nephew, and when I approach him I feel sorry for him. All of you get together and kill his helpers so that he himself can be killed easily." Thus exhorted, the vanaras fell violently upon the demons. The demons retaliated and attacked the mighty Jambavan. Indrajit fought alternately with Vibhisana and also Laks- mana. The action was so fast that no one could see them firing at one another. The sky was obscured by the fire. Later the sun set and darkness began to envelop the world.

Laksmana shot the 'horses' (engines) of Indrajit. With another missile, he beheaded the driver of Indrajit's car. Undaunted, Indrajit drove his own vehicle, while yet fighting. The vanara heroes, however, pounced upon the vehicle and killed (silenced) the horses (engines) of Indrajit's car. The clever demon exhorted his army to keep fighting even more furiously than before and while they were doing so quietly slipped into Lanka to get another armoured car for himself.

Once again a fierce duel took place between Indrajit and Laksmana. The latter knocked the former's weapon down. Laksmana also hit Indrajit on his chest and severely wounded him. Indrajit returned the fire. Laksmana sent a hail of missiles on all the demons and on Indrajit, too. And, once again, he killed the demon's driver. But Indrajit did not mind because the 'horses' (engines) of the new vehicle could function without a driver! All the missiles that Indrajit aimed at Laksmana seemed to strike the latter and fall down. Indrajit assumed that Laksmana had a shatter-proof armour on, and so hit him on the forehead. Indrajit also shot Vibhisana at the same time. The latter, wield- ing his mace, killed the demon's horses (smashed the engines). Enraged at this, Indrajit hurled a javelin at Vibhiṣana which Laksmana successfully intercepted

Both Laksmana and Indrajit began using powerful missiles at each other: Laksmana intercepted Indrajit's missiles in the air, neutralised them and both missiles fell on the earth. Laksmana answered Indrajit's missile with a counter-missile: and he diverted the demon's fire-missile with his own sun-missile. Finally, taking up a missile of Indra, Laksmana said: "If Rama is devoted to dharma and truth, let this end Indrajit's Life." That missile cut off

the head of Indrajit which fell on the battlefield. The demons fled. The vanaras celebrated the event.

esa panthah suyodhanam sarva 'maraganeşv api

yah krte hanyate bhartuh sa puman svargam rcchati (93.9)

Accompanied by Vibhisana and Hanuman and the other vanara leaders, Laksmana approached Rama, and Vibhişana announced the joyous news that Laksmana had indeed killed the mighty Indrajit. Rama was highly delighted and extolled Laksmana again and again: "You have done the most difficult feat!" Laksmana was modest; out of affection for him Rama forcibly drew him to himself, and placing him on his lap kissed his head and looked at him again and again with great pride and joy. And, again, he said to Laksmana: "Victory is assured now that Indrajit has been killed by you in just three days. Now, Ravana himself will appear on the battlefield along with his army: and I shall easily dispose of him. With your help, O Laksmana, I can recover Sita and even conquer the whole world."

Ravana fainted on hearing that Indrajit had been killed. Regaining his consciousness, he lamented: "Alas, you who terrorised the gods, Indra and even the god of death, how is it that you have preceded me, instead of performing my obsequies first? But, surely, you have gone to the highest heaven to which they who lay down their lives in the cause of their master ascend. This is the path of all noble warriors. Today the gods, the ascetics and brahmanas will sleep well: but today the whole world appears bleak to me."

Ravana was completely overcome by terrible anger. He thought "I still have the terrible weapon which I obtained from the creator Brahma: with it I shall kill Rama and Laksmana and all their warriors." He also thought: "My beloved son Indrajit played a trick on the vanaras, and for this purpose he killed an illusory form of Sita: I shall now turn that into a fact! I shall kill Sita." He picked up his terrible sword and rushed to the asoka-grove. The demons yelling with joy followed him. His wives and also his ministers followed him apprehensively.

Seeing him approach her angrily, sword in hand, sita was worried and puzzled: "Is he coming to kill me? Or, has he killed Rama and Laksmana? What may be the cause of the shouts of joy I heard from the demons? Alas,

I did a foolish thing in not accepting Hanuman's offer to take me away to Rama." Divining Ravana's intention, his minister Suparsva admonished him: "Ŏ King, pray, do not yield to anger and commit this heinous crime. Killing a woman is entirely unworthy of your greatness. You have fulfilled all the vows of a brahmana of Vedic learning; and you are devoted to your own duties. How then do you contemplate the killing of a woman? Turn your anger on Rama, and you will kill him without doubt; and then you can make Sita your consort!" Ravana cooled down and accepted the minister's counsel.

te tu rama sahasrani rane pasyanti raksasah

punah pasyanti kakutstham ekam eva maha have (94.27)

At Ravana's request the entire army marched to the battle- field. The 'demons and the vanaras immediately joined in a fierce battle. The casualties were numberless on both sides. For the protection of the vanaras, Rama himself entered the battlefield; and with his mighty weapon cut down the demons. The demons were greatly awed by the inconceivable might of Rama. He was so swift in the discharge of the missiles that the demons could not even see where he was! They shouted "There he is, killing the army of elephants; there he is, killing the commanders of our forces; there he is, killing infantrymen and their horses." They even saw each other as Rama and killed each other! Rama used the missile which caused confusion: utterly confused by this, the demons saw thousands of Rama all around them; and later realised that there was only one Rama. Sometimes, they could only see Rama's firearm and not Rama himself. They saw Rama's weapon flitting about like a firebrand killing the demons: they could not see Rama. In three hours time, two hundred thousand soldiers and a great number of elephants and horses had been killed by Rama, singlehanded, with his firearm which emitted tongues of fire. Rama said to his companions: "Such power to use these missiles is possessed only by me and Tryambaka."

In Lanka, the demonesses got together in small groups and lamented: "alas, what made that dreadful-looking, cruel and aged demoness Surpanaka cast a lustful eye on this charming prince Rama? It was surely our doom and the doom of all the demons that prompted her to aspire for the love of Rama. In the same way, it was surely our misfortune that tempted Viradha to have

evil intentions towards Sita. Even after that, our king Ravana had plenty of warnings: the killing by Rama of fourteen thousand demons, of Khara and Duşana and Trisira, Kabandha, and the killing of the mighty Vali, the enthronement of Sugriva any of these should have been sufficient warning to enable Ravana to assess the might of Rama and desist from the evil course. Ravana also had the wise advice of Vibhisana; he could have realised the immense might of Rama when Kumbhakarna killed or at least when atikaya was killed. Even Indrajit's fall has not made him wise! Alas we have lost all our kith and kin. Surely, Death himself has come in the form of Rama. We have heard that in answer to the prayer of the oppressed holy men, lord Siva granted them the boon: 'For the destruction of the demons, a woman will be born on earth.' Ravana obtained a boon- of-invincibility from Brahma, but scornfully ignored human beings: and surely this human Rama has come to kill him. Vibhişana was wise: and he has in good time sought Rama's asylum we have no one to protect us; we have nowhere to go."

hato bharta hato bhrata yasaṁ ca tanaya hatah

vadhena 'dya ripostasam karomy as rupramarjanam (96.12)

Ravana himself heard the piteous laments of the demonesses. He looked, with great anger, at the demon-chiefs standing around him, and ordered: "March!" all of them and their own divisions marched immediately to the battlefield. Ravana said to the demon-chiefs Mahodara, Mahaparsva and Virupaksa: "To- day I shall myself kill Rama and Lakşmana and thus avenge the killing of Khara, Kumbhakarna, Prahastha and Indrajit. The heads of all my enemies will roll on the ground. By their destruction I shall wipe the tears of those whose brothers and sons have been killed. Bring my armoured car. Bring my weapons. Let the army follow me to the battlefield."

There was total conscription: the demon-chiefs rounded up every able-bodied demon in Lanka and rushed them all to the battlefield for the final and decisive combat. Ravana got into his very special armoured car which awed even the demons. On the battlefield itself, warriors were saying to one another: "Here comes Ravana, the king of the demons, who is accompanied by his special regalia; here comes one who abducted Sita, who is of evil conduct, and who killed the brahmanas and terrorised even the gods: here he comes to fight with Rama." Surrounded by the demon-chiefs, Ravana

approached the gate where Rama and Laks- mana were. There were many evil omens; but Ravana proceeded disregarding them.

Ravana began to attack the vanara forces who fell in huge numbers before his advance. Placing Susena in charge of these vanaras, Sugriva went forward to the front ranks where the bat- tle was. With a rain of rocks, he killed countless demons.

The demon Virupaksa came to their rescue, mounted on an elephant. He directed a volley of shots at Sugriva who, undaunted by this, picked up a big tree and with it hit the elephant which retreated and trumpeted. Virupaksa jumped down from the elephant and rushed towards Sugriva.

Sugriva took a huge rock and hurled it at Virupaksa who, however, escaped in time, and struck Sugriva with a sword. This made Sugriva unconscious for a time. Recovering after a little while, Šugriva struck the demon with his clenched fist. The de-mon hit Sugriva again with his sword and broke his armour. Sugriva actually fell down; but quickly regaining his foothold, he gave a resounding slap on the chest of the demon.

Virupaksa dodged that blow, but he himself hit Sugriva with a clenched fist. Greatly enraged, Sugriva delivered a heavy and powerful blow on the temple of Virupaksa: vomiting blood and with blood pouring like water from all the apertures of his body, the demon fell down dead.

hatva tam vanaraih sardham nanada mudito harih

cukrodha ca dasagrivo babhau hṛṣṭas ca raghavah (98.35)

Casualties on both sides were very heavy and the army on the battlefield was getting exceedingly thin. Ravana turned to the demon Mahodara and said: "all my hopes are now pinned on you, O Mahodara: pray, proceed to the battle."

Mahodara went to the battlefield full of zeal and enthusiasm; and he was greeted by a hail of rocks and trees hurled at him by the vanaras. While the vanaras assailed the demons, Mahodara himself began to kill numerous vanaras with his deadly missiles. Some of them fled; and others ran to Sugriva for help. Sugriva engaged the demon in battle. He picked up a huge rock and directed it towards Mahodara; the latter however, broke that rock to pieces with his own missile. When Sugriva threw a huge tree at him, Mahodara tore that, too, to pieces. Sugriva picked up a bludgeon that was

lying on the battlefield and with it killed (silenced) the horses (engines) of the de- mon's vehicle.

Mahodara attacked Sugriva with his mace; Sugriva responded with his bludgeon. When Mahodara hurled his mace at him, Sugriva intercepted it with his bludgeon. The mace fell down and the bludgeon broke. Sugriva picked up a club from the battlefield and directed it at the demon: Mahodara responded with the mace. Both of them collided in the air and fell to the ground. The two heroes thereafter fought with their bare hands. After wrestling for a while, Mahodara picked up a sword and fought with it. So did Sugriva. Mahodara hit Sugriva's armour with the sword. Un- daunted by it, Sugriva cut off the demon's head with his sword. Sugriva was pleased; Ravana became angry; and Rama was happy.

The demon Mahaparsva attacked the forces of angada. Great was the destruction of the vanaras at his hands. Angada was enraged and distressed. Picking up a bludgeon, he hurled it at the demon, who was temporarily rendered unconscious by the blow. Utilising this opportunity, the vanara hero Jambavan destroyed the demon's armoured car.

Regaining consciousness, Mahaparsva once again attacked angada, and also the other vanara heroes, Gavaksa and Jambavan. And once again angada directed his bludgeon at the demon. This knocked down the demon's weapon from his hand and tossed the helmet from his head. Angada also landed a powerful blow with his hand on the demon's temple. Mahaparsva threw a terrible looking axe at angada which, luckily, the latter dodged.

Clenching his fist firmly, Angada aimed a mighty blow at the vital part of the demon. As the fist landed on his breast with the strength of a thunderbolt, his chest burst open and the demon fell dead. Seeing this, Ravana was utterly confused and enraged; and the vanaras rejoiced.

adya karma karisyami yal lokah sacara 'carah

sadevah kathayisyanti yavad bhumir dharisyati (101.56)

Ravana now said to his driver: "Drive on: I shall myself kill Rama and Laksmana and thus destroy root and branch this kicked army that has taken such a heavy toll of my people." Ravana took up a terrible missile which spread darkness, and Killed numerous vanaras with it. Seeing this Rama came forward to challenge Ravana. Now the demons began to fall in great

numbers. Laksmana attacked Ravana who easily neutralised all his missiles. Thereafter Ravana went over to Rama himself and directed a hail of shots at him. But Rama covered them all with an anti-missile known as bhalla. Ravana hit Rama's brows with his missiles, but Rama remained unaffected. Rama directed the terrible missile dedicated to Rudra at Ravana who took it calm- ly. Ravana thereafter used diabolical missiles which seemed to have the heads of lions, tigers, vultures, jackals, serpents, donkeys, boars, dogs, cocks, alligators, etc. Rama noticed this and used the missiles dedicated to the god of fire which had heads resembling fire, the sun, moon, comet, planets and lunar mansions. Rama's missiles neutralised Ravana's in the air.

Ravana directed the Rudra-missile at Rama. From this came forth diverse weapons -- maces, clubs, tridents, all of adaman- tine strength. Rama counteracted the effect of this missile by using the Gandharva-missile. Ravana then used the sun-god- missile. This gave rise to numerous discuses of inconceivable destructive power. Rama dealt with them effectively with his own weapon. Laksmana shot Ravana's flag and tore it up. He also killed Ravana's driver. He even broke the gun-turret of Ravana.

Ravana turned in all fury against Vibhişana and hurled a terrible weapon known as sakti at him. Laksmana intercepted it, and it fell down letting terrible sparks of fire fly from it. Enraged, Ravana now turned to Laksmana: "ah, since you are cover- ing Vibhisana, I shall take your life with this Sakti. "It was an extremely powerful weapon which was infallible. As it came fly- ing towards Laksmana, Rama prayed! The weapon hit Laksmana and he was made unconscious. Rama was shocked. But he said to him- self: "This is not the time for grief. "And he continued to fight with great fury. But the vanaras could not extract sakti from Laksmana's body; Rama himself had to do it. As he was thus help- ing his brother, Ravana shot him several times. Angered, Rama said to the vanaras: "Protect Laksmana from all sides, while I turn to Ravana and rid the world of him. On account of him I have endured great sorrow; and I shall give up all that sorrow after killing this Ravana. On account of him I have had to drag numerous vanaras to the battle. Today I shall, by killing this Ravana, perform a deed which shall be Remembered and recalled for all time to come throughout the world." Unable to face the terrible missiles which Rama now used, Ravana fled.

idam aindram mahac capaṁ kavacam ca 'gni samnibham

saras ca 'ditya saṁkasah sakttis ca vimala sita (103.12)

When Ravana withdrew from the battlefield, Rama returned to Laksmana. Seeing him lying unconscious, as if dead, Rama was stricken with despondence. He lamented: "Seeing my beloved brother, dearer to me than my own life, lying thus bathed in blood, I have no power to fight. My weapon slips from my hand; my legs have no strength to support me. There is a strong desire to give up my life. What will I gain by victory, when my brother is no more? How will I face my kinsfolk without him? He followed me to the forest; I shall follow him in death."

The vanara Susena tried to comfort Rama, saying: "Laksmana is not dead, O Rama. Hence, give up this grief." He said to Hanuman: "Go and quickly fetch the life-saving herbs that you fetched before, growing on the Mahodaya mountain." Hanuman knew the route which had previously been pointed out to him by Jambavan. He went there with great expedition. He returned very soon and placing a mountain-peak before Susena said: "I could not see the herbs; so I have brought the peak." Susena discovered the herbs, crushed them and administered them to Laksmana. In-haling the herbs, Laksmana regained consciousness. Rama was happy, but he continued to be sentimental, repeating: "If you had not been revived, my victory would be useless."

Reminded of the gravity of the situation, Rama directed his fire in the direction of Ravana's army. Soon Ravana himself appeared in his armoured car and covered Rama with his weapon. The celestials felt that the duel was ill-matched since Ravana had an armoured vehicle (perhaps a tank) and Rama was standing on the ground. Indra, the chief of gods, quickly despatched his own armoured car, along with his driver Matali. This armoured car had 'green horses'. Matali placed the car in front of Rama and said: "Indra has sent his own car and his powerful weapons, including sakti, for your use and to enable you to gain victory."

In the fierce battle that ensued, Ravana discharged a missile that turned into venomous snakes: and Rama neutralised them by using another missile which released eagles into the air. Greatly enraged, Ravana used even more powerful missiles and harassed Rama, who could not even use his weapons freely. The celestials exhorted Rama, and the demons exhorted Ravana. The latter took up a terrible weapon, a trident which was strong as adamant,

fiery, with terrible spikes and which produced thunderous noise. He said: "Rama, when I hurl this, you will it be dead." as it came towards him, Rama tried to intercept it with his missiles which were reduced to ashes by the trident. Rama then used the sakti of Indra. Intercepted by sakti in the air, the trident was split and it fell to the ground. Rama pursued this by attacking Ravana himself.

pasyato yuddha lubdho 'ham kṛtah kapurusas tvaya

yas tvam ratham imam mohan na co 'dvahasi durmate

satyo 'yam prati tarko me pareṇa tvam upaskṛtah (106.7)

Tormented by the missiles of Rama, the demon-chief Ravana became terribly enraged. He literally covered Rama with his fire. However, Rama successfully intercepted all the missiles of the demon. In that awe-inspiring battle, and in the dust and the fire raised by the battle, even Rama and Ravana could not be seen. Laughing derisively, Rama said to Ravana: "O Ravana, I guess that you think you are a great hero. You are not! By the very fact that you stole, without my knowledge, my wife Sita from Janasthana is proof that you are no hero! You laid your hands on another's wife when she was unprotected, and yet you consider yourself a hero! You will now suffer the consequences of that wicked and unchivalrous action. Shamelessly you carried Sita away when she was alone: if you had attempted to do so in my presence, you would have joined Khara in the other world. Luckily, you have yourself appeared before me. I shall sever your head from your body and beasts and vultures will feed on your flesh."

Rama's anger augmented his strength and his prowess. The divine missiles, as it were, sought Rama's presence at that time, and the joy that filled Rama's heart at the impending and imminent destruction of Ravana enabled him to shoot the latter with great ease and speed. He also perceived good omens and was greatly encouraged by them. Rama fought furiously; and Ravana was overwhelmed by the missiles of Rama. Seeing the utter confusion of Ravana, his driver drove the car away from the battlefield.

When Ravana realised what the charioteer had done, he was angry. He said to his charioteer: "You have disgraced my name. You have shamed my valour. My glory has been effaced by this cowardly action of yours. When my enemy was looking on and I was eager to fight him, you drove the car

away from the battle- field! If you do not take me back at once to the battlefield I shall be compelled to conclude that you have been bribed by my enemy to bring me this disrepute.

The driver explained: "Master! It is the duty of a good driver to be aware of the condition and the strength of his master, of the condition of the battlefield, the strength and the weakness of the enemy, and he should know when to attack and when to retreat. Considering all this and seeing that you were fatigued and fearing that you would be overpowered by your enemy, I acted in your own best interest. Such indeed was my duty. Now that you command me to take the car back to the battlefield, I shall certainly do so and thus fulfil my duty to my master whose favours I have not forgotten."

aditya hṛdayam punya sarva šatru vinašanam

jayavaham japen nityam aksayyam paramam šivam (107.4)

The sage Agastya appeared on the scene of the battle along with the gods, and seeing that Rama was fatigued by the prolonged combat with Ravana, said to him:

"O Rama! Listen carefully to this secret. It is the heart of the sun: and its constant repetition is conducive to victory and to all auspiciousness, and to the destruction of enemies. Worship the sun, O Rama! He is the very essence of all the gods and he alone protects all beings. He is the controller of the celestial bodies. He is the splendour of splendours. Pray to him thus:

tejasam api tejasvi dvadasatman namo 'stu te

namah purvaya giraye pascimaya 'draye namah

jyotirgananam pataye dina 'dhipataye namah (16)

jayaya jayabhadraya haryasvaya namo namah

namo namah sahasramso adityaya namo namah (17)

nama ugraya viraya sarangaya namo namah

namah padma prabodhaya_pracandaya namo'stu te (18)

brahme 'sana 'cyute 'saya suryaya 'ditya varcase

bhasvate_sarva bhaksaya raudraya vapuşe namah (19)

tamo ghnaya hima ghnaya satru ghnaya 'mitatmane

krtaghna ghnaya devaya jyotisam pataye namah (20)

tapta camikarabhaya haraye visva karmane

namas tamo 'bhinighnaya rucaye loka saksipe (21)

"The sun, O Rama, is the creator and the destroyer of everything. He is awake even in those who sleep. He is the lord of all actions. He who worships the sun never comes to grief and overcomes fear and calamities. You will this very moment conquer Ravana." Saying so, Agastya withdrew. Rama sipped water, looked at the sun, recited the prayer, and advanced towards Ravana, his heart filled with delight.

At the same time, Ravana's driver also brought his car to the battlefield. Rama said to Matali: "Pray, be vigilant and calm. For the time has come for me to destroy this demon. Hence, it is vital that you should not be confused nor yield to anxiety, but drive the car vigilantly and swiftly. I am sure that being Indra's own driver, you need not be told all this: yet, since my whole being is concentrated on this combat, I am reminding you but not admonishing you!"

The final battle between Rama and Ravana followed. At that time, Ravana saw many, many evil omens. And, Rama saw many auspicious and good omens. Knowing the meaning and the significance of these omens, Rama was happy, and this greatly augmented his strength and his valour.

gaganam gagana 'karam sagarah sagaro 'pamam

rama ravanayor yuddham rama ravanayor iva (110.23)

When Rama and Ravana began to fight, their armies stood stupefied, watching them! Rama was determined to win; Ravana was sure he would die: knowing this, they fought with all their might. Ravana attacked the standard on Rama's car; and Rama similarly shot the standard on Ravana's car. While Ravana's standard fell; Rama's did not. Ravana next aimed at the 'horses! (engines) of Rama's car: even though he attacked them with all his might, they remained unaffected.

Both of them discharged thousands of missiles: these illumined the skies and created a new heaven, as it were! They were accurate in their aim and their missiles unfailingly hit the target. With unflagging zeal they fought

each other, without the least trace of fatigue. What one did the other did in retaliation.

Ravana shot at Matali who remained unaffected by it. Then Ravana sent a shower of maces and mallets at Rama. Their very sound agitated the oceans and tormented the aquatic creatures. The celestials and the holy brahmanas witnessing the scene prayed: "May auspiciousness attend to all the living beings, and may the worlds endure forever. May Rama conquer Ra- astounded at the way in which Rama and Ravana fought with each other, the sages said to one another: "Sky is like sky, ocean is like ocean; the fight between Rama and Ravana is Like Rama and Ravana -- incomparable."

Taking up a powerful missile, Rama correctly aimed at the head of Ravana; it fell. But another head appeared in its place. Every time Rama cut off Ravana's head, another appeared! Rama was puzzled. Matali, Rama's driver, said to Rama: "Why do you fight like an ordinary warrior, O Rama? Use the Brahma-missile; the hour of the demon's death is at hand."

Rama remembered the Brahma-missile which the sage Agastya had given him. It had the power of the windgod for its 'feathers'; the power of fire and sun at its head; the whole space was its body; and it had the weight of a mountain. It shone like the sun or the fire of nemesis. As Rama took it in his hands, the earth shook and all living beings were terrified. Infallible in its destructive power, this ultimate weapon of destruction shattered the chest of Ravana, and entered deep into the earth.

Ravana fell dead. And the surviving demons fled, pursued by the vanaras. The vanaras shouted in great jubilation. The air resounded with the drums of the celestials. The gods praised Rama. The earth became steady, the wind blew softly and the sun was resplendent as before. Rama was surrounded by mighty heroes and gods who were all joyously felicitating him on the victory.

marana 'ntani vairani nirvṛttam nah prayojanam

kriyatam asya sams karo mama 'py eṣa yatha tava (112.25)

Seeing Ravana lying dead on the battlefield, Vibhisana burst into tears: Overcome by brotherly affection, he lamented thus: "alas, what I had predicted has come true: and my advice was not relished by you, overcome as you were by lust and delusion. Now that you have departed, the glory of

Lanka has de- parted. You were like a tree firmly established in heroism with asceticism for its strength, spreading out firmness in all aspects of your life: yet you have been cut down. You were like an elephant with splendour, noble ancestry, indignation, and pleasant nature for its parts: yet you have been killed. You, who were like a blazing fire have been extinguished by Rama."

Rama approached the grief-stricken Vibhişana and gently and lovingly said to him: "It is not right that you should thus grieve, O Vibhisana, for a mighty warrior fallen on the battlefield. Victory is the monopoly of none: a hero is either slain in battle or he kills his opponent. Hence our ancients decreed that the warrior who is killed in combat should not be mourned. Get up and consider what should be done next."

Vibhişana regained his composure and said to Rama: "This Ravana used to give a lot in charity to ascetics; he enjoyed life; he maintained his servants well; he shared his wealth with his friends, and he destroyed his enemies. He was regular in his religious observances; learned he was in the scriptures. By your grace, O Rama, I wish to perform his funeral in accordance with the scriptures, for his welfare in the other world." Rama was delighted and said to Vibhisana: "Hostility ends at death. Take steps for the due performance of the funeral rites. He is your brother as he is mine, too."

The womenfolk of Ravana's court, and his wives, hearing of his end, rushed out of the palace, and, arriving at the battlefield, rolled on the ground in sheer anguish. Overcome by grief they gave vent to their feelings in diverse heart-rending ways. They wailed: "alas, he who could not be killed by the gods and demons, has been killed in battle by a man standing on earth. Our beloved lord! Surely when you abducted Sita and brought her to Lanka, you invited your own death! Surely it was because death was close at hand that you did not listen to the wise counsel of your own brother Vibhisana, and you ill-treated him and exiled him. Even later if you had restored Sita to Rama, this evil fate would not have overtaken you. However, it is surely not because you did what you liked, because you were driven by lust, that you lie dead now: God's will makes people do diverse deeds. He who is killed by the divine will dies. No one can flout the divine will, and no one can buy the divine will nor bribe it."

vyakttam eşa mahayogi paramatma sanatanah

anadi madhya nidhano mahatah paramo mahan (14)

Inconsolable in grief, Mandodari, Ravana's wife lamented : "O Lord, no one in the three worlds could conquer you. Even the gods and their chief, Indra, could not face you: how is it that a mere mortal has killed you? Surely, this Rama is none other than the supreme being, without beginning middle or end, greater than the greatest, eternal and unshakable: he alone has assumed this appearance of a human being for the welfare of all beings. He, surrounded by the gods in the disguise of the vanaras, and, having previously conquered the senses, has now slain you. It was evident even when Khara was killed by him, and when Hanuman devastated Lanka by the grace of Rama. Alas, it was because you were doomed that you sought to seduce Sita. You were not immediately burnt on that occasion, because the god of fire was afraid of you. But the fruits of ones deeds cannot be cheated: Vibhişana who took refuge in Rama, enjoys good fortune and you who sinned against him are dead. It was unnecessary for you to have sought Sita: she is by no means my equal in beauty, ancestry or culture. But you sought your death by seeking her. Alas, how happily we roamed together on mountains: now your beautiful form has been shattered by Rama's missiles. It is difficult to believe that you who were a terror to the gods, demons, sages, ascetics, and who were an adept in magic, could reach this end. Alas, you have departed carrying your own karma with you: but we live forlorn. My heart is obviously hard: how is it that I live when you are dead? Widowed, see how all of us have rushed out of the inner apartments without our veils: why is it that you are not angry at this? I have heard it said that the tears of a faithful wife are never shed in vain. I can see now that the tears that Sita shed have brought about your end. The curses of all the good ladies whom you molested have borne this bitter fruit." While she was lamenting thus, the other women tried to console her with the words: "Pray, do not give way to grief. Do you not know that the fortunes of kings are fleeting?"

Rama urged Vibhisana to carry on with the funeral rites. Vibhisana felt: "Ravana was vicious and if I honour him by per- forming his funeral rites, people will hold me in contempt, too." Rama, however, repeated his arguments: "Hostility ends with death. He is your brother and he is mine, too. Let the funeral rites proceed."

The brahmanas who knew the scriptural injunctions prepared the funeral pyre in strict accordance with Vedic ordinance. To- wards the conclusion of the ritual, Vibhişana set alight the funeral pyre.

All of them returned to the city. When the womenfolk had re-entered the inner apartments of the palace, Vibhişana stood near Rama humbly gazing at him. Rama had laid down his weapon and the missiles once and for all and was once more gentle and sweet.

na parah papam adatte paresam papa karmanaṁ

samayo raksitavyas tu santas caritra bhusanah

Rama returned to the camp where the vanara troops had been stationed. He turned to Laksmana and said: "O Laksmana, install Vibhisana on the throne of Lanka and consecrate him as the king of Lanka. He has rendered invaluable service to me and I wish to behold him on the throne of Lanka at once."

Without the least loss of time, Laksmana made the necessary preparations and with the waters of the ocean consecrated Vibhishana as king of Lanka, in strict accordance with scriptural ordinance. Rama, Laksmana and the others were delighted. The demon-leaders brought their tributes and offered them to Vibhisana who in turn placed them all at Rama's feet.

Rama said to Hanuman: "Please go, with the permission of king Vibhisana, to Sita and inform her of the death of Ravana and the welfare of both myself and Laksmana." Immediately Hanuman left for the asoka-grove. The grief-stricken Sita was happy to behold him. With joined palms Hanuman submitted Rama's message and added: "Rama desires me to inform you that you can shed fear, for you are in your own home as it were, now that Vibhisana is king of Lanka." Sita was speechless for a moment and then said: "I am delighted by the message you have brought, O Hanuman: and I am rendered speechless by it. I only regret that I have nothing now with which to reward you; nor is any gift equal in value to the most joyous tidings you have brought me." Hanuman submitted: "O lady, the very words you have uttered are more precious than all the jewels of the world! I consider my- self supremely blessed to have witnessed Rama's victory and Ravana's destruction." Sita was even more delighted: she said, "Only you can utter

such sweet words, O Hanuman, endowed as you are with manifold excellences. Truly you are an abode of virtues."

Hanuman said: "Pray, give me leave to kill all these demonesses who have been tormenting you so long." Sita replied: "Nay, Hanuman, they are not responsible for their actions, for they were but obeying their master's commands. And, surely, it was my own evil destiny that made me suffer at their hands. Hence, I forgive them. A noble man does not recognise the harm done to him by others: and he never retaliates, for he is the embodiment of goodness. One should be compassionate towards all, the good and the wicked, nay even towards those who are fit to be killed: who is free from sin?" Hanuman was thrilled to hear these words of Sita, and said: "Indeed you are the noble consort of Rama and his peer in virtue and nobility. Pray, give me a message to take back to Rama." Sita replied: "Please tell him that I am eager to behold his face." assuring Sita that she would see Rama that very day, Hanuman returned to Rama.

na grhani na vastrani na prakaras tiraskriyah

ne 'dṛsa rajasatkara vṛttam avaranam striyah (117.27)

Hanuman conveyed Sita's message to Rama who turned to king Vibhisana and said: "Please bring Sita to me soon, after she has had a bath and has adorned herself." Immediately Vibhishana went to Sita and compelled her to proceed seated in a palanquin, to where Rama was. Vanaras and demons had gathered around her, eager to look at Sita. And Vibhisana, in accordance with the tradition, wished to ensure that Sita was not seen by these and rebuked them to go away. Restraining him, Rama said: "Why do you rebuke them, O Vibhishana? Neither houses nor clothes nor walls constitute a veil for a woman; her character alone is her veil. Let her descend from the palanquin and walk up to me. So she did.

Rama said sternly: "My purpose has been accomplished, O Sita. My prowess has been witnessed by all. I have fulfilled my pledge. Ravana's wickedness has been punished. The extra- ordinary feat performed by Hanuman in crossing the ocean and burning Lanka has borne fruit. Vibhisana’s devotion has been rewarded." Rama's heart was in a state of conflict, afraid as he was of public ridicule. Hence, he continued: "I wish to let you know that all this was done not for your sake, but for the sake of preserving my honour. Your conduct is open to suspicion, hence even your

sight is displeasing to me. Your body was touched by Ravana: how then can I, claiming to belong to a noble family, accept you? Hence I permit you to go where you like and live with whom you like -- either Laksmana, Bharata, Satrughna, Sugriva or even Vibhisana. It is difficult for me to believe that Ravana, who was so fond of you, would have been able to keep away from you for such a long time."

Sita was shocked. Rama's words wounded her heart. Tears streamed down her face. Wiping them, she replied: "O Rama, you are speaking to me in the language of a common and vulgar man speaking to a common woman. That which was under my control, my heart, has always been yours; how could I prevent my body from being touched when I was helpless and under another person's control? Ah, if only you had conveyed your suspicion through Hanuman when he came to meet me, I would have killed myself then and saved you all this trouble and the risk involved in the war." Turning to Laksmana, she said: "Kindle the fire, O Laksmana: that is the only remedy. I shall not live to endure this false calumny." Laksmana looked at Rama and with his approval kindled the fire. Sita prayed: "Even as my heart is ever devoted to Rama, may the fire protect me. If I have been faithful to Rama in thought, word or deed, may the fire protect me? The sun, the moon, the wind, earth and others are witness to my purity; may the fire protect me." Then she entered into the fire, even as an oblation poured into the fire would. Gods and sages witnessed this. The women who saw this screamed.

atmanam manusam manye ramam dasarathatmajam

yo 'ham yasya yatas ca 'ham bhagavans tad bravitu me (120.11)

Rama was moved to tears by the heart-rending cries of all those women who witnessed the self-immolation of Sita. At the same time, all the gods, including the trinity—- the Creator, the Preserver, and the Redeemer (or Transformer), arrived up- on the scene in their personal forms. Saluting Rama, they said: "You are the foremost among the gods, and yet you treat Sita as if you were a common human being!"

Rama replied to these divinities: "I consider myself a human being, Rama the son of Dasaratha. Who I am, and whence I am, may you tell me!"

Brahma the creator said: "You are verily lord Narayana. You are the imperishable cosmic being. You are the truth. You are eternal. You are the

supreme dharma of the worlds. You are the father even of the chief of the gods, Indra. You are the sole refuge of perfected beings and holy men. You are the Om, and you are the spirit of sacrifice. You are that cosmic being with infinite heads, hands and eyes. You are the support of the whole universe. The whole universe is your body. Sita is Laksmi and you are lord Visnu, who is of a dark hue, and who is the creator of all beings. For the sake of the destruction of Ravana you entered into a human body. This mission of ours has been fully accomplished by you. Blessed it is to be in your presence; blessed it is to sing your glories; they are truly blessed who are devoted to you, for their life will be attended with success."

As soon as Brahma finished saying this, the god of fire emerged from the fire in his personal form, holding up Sita in his hands. Sita shone in all her radiance. The god of fire who is the witness of everything that takes place in the world, said to Rama: "Here is your Sita, Rama. I find no fault in her. She has not erred in thought, word or deed. Even during the long period of her detention in the abode of Ravana, she did not even think of him, as her heart was set on you. Accept her: and I command you not to treat her harshly."

Rama was highly pleased at this turn of events. He said: "Indeed, I was fully aware of Sita's purity. Even the mighty and wicked Ravana could not lay his hands upon her with evil intention. Yet, this baptism by fire was necessary, to avoid public calumny and ridicule, for though she was pure, she lived in Lanka for a long time. I knew, too, that Sita would never be unfaithful to me: for we are non-different from each other even as the sun and its rays are. It is therefore impossible for me to renounce her."

After saying so, Rama was joyously reunited with Sita.

te sarve vanaras tasmai raghavaya 'bhyavadayan

kakutstham paripurnartham dṛṣṭva sarve surottamah (123.17)

Lord Siva then said to Rama: "You have fulfilled a most difficult task. Now behold your father, the illustrious king Dasaratha who appears in the firmament to bless you and to greet you."

Rama along with Laksmana saw that great monarch, their father clad in a raiment of purity and shining by his own lustre. Still seated in his celestial vehicle, Dasaratha lifted up Rama and placing him on his lap, warmly

embraced him and said: "Neither heaven nor even the homage of the gods is as pleasing to me as to behold you, Rama. I am delighted to see that you have successfully completed the period of your exile and that you have destroyed all your enemies. Even now the cruel words of Kaikeyi haunt my heart; but seeing you and embracing you, I am rid of that sorrow, O Rama. You have redeemed my word and thus I have been saved by you. It is only now that I recognise you to be the supreme person incarnated a human being in this world in order to kill Ravana."

Rama said: "You remember that you said to Kaikeyi, 'I renounce you and your son'? Pray, take back that curse and may it not afflict Kaikeyi and Bharata." Dasaratha agreed to it and then said to Laksmana: "I am pleased with you, my son, and you have earned great merit by the faithful service you have rendered to Rama."

Lastly, king Dasaratha said to Sita: "My dear daughter, do not take to heart the fire ordeal that Rama forced you to under- go: it was necessary to reveal to the world your absolute purity. By your conduct you have exalted yourself above all women." Having thus spoken to them, Dasaratha ascended to heaven.

Before taking leave of Rama, Indra prayed: "Our visit to you should not be fruitless, O Rama. Command me, what may I do for you?" Rama replied: "If you are really pleased with me, then I pray that all those vanaras who laid down their lives for my sake may come back to life. I wish to see them hale and hearty as before. I also wish to see the whole world fruitful and prosperous." Indra replied: "This indeed is an extremely difficult task. Yet, I do not go back on my word, hence I grant it. All the vanaras will come back to life and be restored to their original form, with all their wounds healed. Even as you had asked, the world will be fruitful and prosperous instantly, all the vanaras arose from the dead and bowed to Rama. The others who witnessed this marvelled and the gods beheld Rama who had all his wishes fulfilled. The gods returned to their abodes.

tam vina kaikayiputram bharatam dharma carinam

na me snanam bahumatam vastrany abharanani ca (124.6)

Vibhisana approached Rama and said: "Pray, O Rama, a bath is ready for you as Also raiments and ornaments for you to wear." Rama, however,

replied: "What shall I do with bath, raiments and ornaments, O Vibhisana, without first seeing the noble Bharata? Can you find a way by which we can return to Ayodhya with expedition?"

Vibhisana replied: "Surely, there is, O Rama. I shall see that you return to Ayodhya within the course of a single day. I have the celestial aircraft called Puspaka which my brother Ravana had wrested from the possession of Kubera, the lord of wealth. It is with me, but for your sake. It looks like a cloud and is capable of flying like a cloud in the sky; and with it you can easily reach Ayodhya without any anxiety."

Vibhisana had the aircraft Puspaka brought at once. It was like a big mansion. It shone like the sun. It was made entirely of gold and diamonds. Even Rama was wonderstruck to see it. Rama then said to Vibhisana: "All these vanaras and others have helped you in the accomplishment of your great mission. It is, therefore, proper that you should honour them and reward them suitably with wealth, jewels, etc."

Vibhisana complied with Rama's command. After witnessing this, Rama got ready to leave for Ayodhya. He was about to board the aircraft. He said to the assembled vanara leaders: "You have regarded me as your friend, and you have all rendered me a very great service. Now you may return to your own abodes. O Sugriva, you, too, may now return to Kişkindha accompanied by your troops. O Vibhisana, pray consolidate this kingdom of Lanka which is now yours. And I shall with your leave return to Ayodhya."

On behalf of the vanara leaders and the principal demons, Vibhisana submitted to Rama: "Rama, we, too, wish to accompany you to Ayodhya. We are eager to witness your coronation. We wish to pay our homage in person to mother Kausalya, too. Grant us this prayer." Rama was happy to hear this and replied: "Sure- ly, what you have said augments my joy and intensifies my de- light. Certainly, if I return to Ayodhya surrounded by all of you my friends, we shall be enhancing the joy and the happiness of Bharata and the other kinsmen there."

Delighted to have Rama's permission, the vanara leaders and Sugriva, and also Vibhisana and his ministers, boarded that excellent aircraft Puspaka.

anujnatam tu rameṇa tad vimanam anuttamam

utpapata maha meghah svasaneno 'ddato yatha (126. 1)

With Rama's permission the aircraft Puspaka took off giving off a mighty roaring sound. As the aircraft flew over the city of Lanka, over the battlefield and so on, Rama pointed out to Sita and said: "Behold this Lanka built on top of the mount Trikuta, O Sita!" He continued to show her all the important landmarks. They were flying over Kişkindha territory, and Sita said to Rama: "I would like to return to ayodhya in the company of the wives of Sugriva and the other vanara leaders, O Lord."

Rama ordered the aircraft to land and then said to Sugriva: "Let the wives of the vanara chiefs come on board as soon as possible, so that they may also accompany us to ayodhya." Sugriva announced the delightful command to the womenfolk of Kişkindha: "We shall all witness the triumphant re-entry of Rama into ayodhya." Immediately they came on board, the aircraft took off again.

Once again, Rama showed Sita the various places connected with his wandering. The Ṛsyamuka hill, the Pampa lake, the site of Sabari's hermitage, Janasthana from where Sita was abducted, and also the spot where Jatayu fell. He also showed Sita where their own hermitage was. Later he showed her the river Godavari, the hermitage of Agastya, the hermitages of Sarabhanga and Sutiksna and that of the sage Atri, the Citrakoota where Bharata met him, the hermitage of Bharadvaja, the river Ganga and the abode of Guha, and finally pointing out Ayodhya, he said: "Yonder is Ayodhya, O Sita, pray, bow down to Ayodhya, now that you have safely returned."

But even before he reached Ayodhya, Rama landed once again near the hermitage of the sage Bharadvaja and bowed down to him and enquired of Bharata and other members of the family in Ayodhya. Bharadvaja said: "Bharata, clad in ascetic robes, is eagerly awaiting your return, with your own sandals placed on the throne. All are well in Ayodhya." He also revealed that he knew all that had happened between his previous meeting with Rama and now. "I was unhappy to see you proceeding to the forest then; I am delighted to see you return to the kingdom now," he said, and added: "Choose a boon, Rama, and I shall grant it." Rama asked: "May all the trees on our route from here yield fruits, even if this is not their season. And, may there be plenty of honey en route." The sage said: "May it be so".

Lo and behold, immediately all the trees in the neighbourhood were laden with fruits and honey. The vanaras enjoyed to their hearts' content. At the command of the sage, Rama spent a day at the hermitage.

etac chrutva yam akaram bhajate bharatas tada

sa ca te veditavyah syat sarvam yac ca 'pi mam prati (128.12)

Though Rama gladly agreed to spend a day in the hermitage of the sage Bharadvaja, he was greatly concerned about Bharata and contemplated seriously what he should do. Calling Hanuman to himself, he said to Hanuman: "Pray, O Hanuman, proceed to Srngaverapura at once; and you will meet Guha there. He is a great friend of mine; he is as good as my own self. He will also tell you the route to Ayodhya. Proceed to Ayodhya and meet Bharata and tell him all that happened to me between his meeting with me fourteen years ago and now. Please also inform him that I shall be coming to Ayodhya tomorrow, along with Sugriva and also Vibhisana. Please note very carefully how he feels on hearing all this. Watch every gesture and every expression on his face, whether he is pleased or displeased at the news. It is very difficult for one who has enjoyed the powers of rulership not to be influenced by a desire to keep them. If you feel that Bharata wishes to continue to rule as king, then I shall be delighted to let him rule the whole world."

With the blessings of Rama, Hanuman immediately proceeded to Srngaverapura. He saw Guha and introduced himself to Guha, and then he conveyed to him the joyous news of Rama's return.

Hanuman flew onwards again and reached the little village known as Nandigrama not far from the city of Ayodhya, and there he saw the noble Bharata, the very picture of grief and sorrow, living as an ascetic, clad in ascetic garments and living an extremely ascetic life. Approaching Bharata with joined palms Hanuman said to Bharata, who was well versed in dharma, who appeared to be Dharma itself embodied: "The blessed Rama is well and enquires after your welfare. You will soon behold him here.' Bharata fainted with joy. On regaining consciousness, he shed tears of joy and said to Hanuman: "You may be a god or a man but surely out of great compassion to me, you have come here." He also offered to Hanuman thousands of cows and other objects as his joyous gift.

Bharata enquired: "Pray, tell me everything. How did Rama acquire the friendship of the vanaras and what happened then?" In response to that enquiry, Hanuman told Bharata the entire story of Rama in brief. Hanuman concluded: "at the request of the sage Bharadvaja, Rama decided to spend a day at the sage's hermitage and hence sent me to convey the glad tidings to you. Tomorrow during the auspicious hour known as Pusyayoga, you will behold Rama who has already reached the banks of the holy Ganga and who is living at the hermitage of sage Bharadvaja."

Hearing this, Bharata was exceedingly happy.

tvam asmakaṁ caturnam tu bhrata sugriva pancamah

sauhṛdaj jayate mitraṁ apakaro 'rilaksanam (45)

Bharata immediately made the reception arrangements. He instructed Satrughna: "Let prayers be offered to the gods in all temples and houses of worship with fragrant flowers and musical instruments."

Satrughna immediately gave orders that the roads along which the royal procession would wend its way to the palace should be levelled and sprinkled with water, and kept clear by hundreds of policemen cordoning them. Soon all the ministers, and thousands of elephants and men on horse-back and in cars went out to greet Rama. The royal reception party, seated in palanquins, was led by the queen-mother Kausalya herself; Kaikeyi and the other members of the royal household followed-- and all of them reached Nandigrama.

From there Bharata headed the procession with the sandals of Rama placed on his head, with the white royal umbrella and the other regalia. Bharata was the very picture of an ascetic though he radiated the joy that filled his heart at the very thought of Rama's return to the kingdom.

Bharata anxiously looked around but saw no signs of Rama's return! But, Hanuman reassured him: "Listen, O Bharata, you can see the cloud of dust raised by the vanaras rushing towards Ayodhya. You can now hear the roar of the Puspaka aircraft."

"Rama has come!" these words were uttered by thousands of people at the same time. Even before the Puspaka landed, Bharata humbly saluted Rama who was standing on the front side of the aircraft. The Puspaka landed. As Bharata approached it, Rama lifted him up and placed him on his lap.

Bharata bowed down to Rama and also to Sita and greeted Laksmana. And he embraced Sugriva, Jambavan, Angada, Vibhisana and others. He said to Sugriva: "We are four brothers, and with you we are five. Good deeds promote friendship, and evil is a sign of enmity."

Rama bowed to his mother who had become emaciated through sorrow, and brought great joy to her heart. Then he also bowed to Sumitra and Kaikeyi. All the people thereupon said to Rama: "Welcome, welcome back, O Lord."

Bharata placed the sandals in front of Rama, and said: "Rama here is your kingdom which I held in trust for you during your absence. I consider myself supremely blessed in being able to behold your return to Ayodhya. By your grace, the treasury has been enriched tenfold by me, as also the storehouses and the Rama felt delighted. When the entire strength of the nation." party had disembarked, he instructed that the Puspaka aircraft be returned to its original owner, Kubera.

ramo ramo rama iti prajanam abhavan kathah

ramabhutam jagad abhud rame rajyam prasasati (1O2)

The coronation proceedings were immediately initiated by Bharata. Skilled barbers removed the matted locks of Rama. He had a ceremonial bath and he was dressed in magnificent robes and royal jewels. Kausalya herself helped the vanara ladies to dress themselves in royal robes; all the queens dressed Sita appropriately for the occasion. The royal chariot was brought; duly ascending it, Rama, Laksmana and Sita, went in a procession to Ayodhya, Bharata himself driving the chariot. When he had reached the court, Rama gave his ministers and counsellors a brief account of the events during his exile, particularly the alliance with the vanara chief Sugriva, and the exploits of Hanuman. He also informed them of his alliance with Vibhisana.

At Bharata's request, Sugriva despatched the best of the vanaras to fetch water from the four oceans, and all the sacred rivers of the world. The aged sage Vasistha thereupon commenced the ceremony in connection with the coronation of Rama. Rama and sita were seated on a seat made entirely of precious stones. The foremost among the sages thereupon consecrated Rama with the appropriate Vedic chants. First the brahmanas, then the virgins, then the ministers and warriors, and later the business- men poured

the holy waters on Rama. After that the sage Vasistha placed Rama on the throne made of gold and studded with precious stones, and placed on his head the dazzling crown which had been made by Brahma the creator himself. The gods and others paid their homage to Rama by bestowing gifts upon him. Rama al- so gave away rich presents to the brahmanas and others, including the vanara chiefs like Sugriva. Rama then gave to Sita a necklace of pearls and said: "You may give it to whom you like, sita. And, immediately Sita bestowed that gift upon Hanuman.

After witnessing the coronation of Rama, the Vanaras returned to Kişkindha. So did Vibhisana return to Lanka? Rama looked fondly at Laksmana and expressed the wish that he should reign as the prince regent. Laksmana did not reply: he did not want it. Rama appointed Bharata as prince regent. Rama thereafter ruled the earth for a very long time.

During the period of Rama's reign, there was no poverty, no crime, no fear, and no unrighteousness in the kingdom. All the people constantly spoke of Rama; the whole world had been transformed into Rama. Everyone was devoted to dharma. And Rama was highly devoted to dharma, too. He ruled for eleven thousand years.

ramayanam idam kṛtsnam šṛnvatah pathatah sada

priyate satatam ramah sa hi visnuh sanatanah (118)

Rama's rule of the kingdom was characterised by the effortless and spontaneous prevalence of dharma. People were free from fear of any sort. There were no widows in the land: people were not molested by beasts and snakes, nor did they suffer from diseases. There was no theft, no robbery nor any violence. Young people did not die making older people perform funeral services for them. Everyone was happy and everyone was devoted to dharma; beholding Rama alone, no one harmed another. People lived long and had many children. They were healthy and they were free from sorrow. Everywhere people were speaking all the time about Rama; the entire world appeared to be the form of Rama. The trees were endowed with undying roots, and they were in fruition all the time and they flowered throughout the year. Rain fell whenever it was needed. There was a pleasant breeze always. The brahmanas (priests), the warriors, the farmers and businessmen, as also the members of the servant class, were entirely free from greed, and were joyously devoted to their own dharma and functions in society. There

was no falsehood in the life of the people who were all righteous. People were endowed with all auspicious characteristics and all of them had dharma as their guiding light. Thus did Rama rule the world for eleven thousand years, surrounded by his brothers?

This holy epic Ramayana composed by the sage Valmiki, promotes dharma, fame, long life and in the case of a king, victory. He who listens to it always is freed from all sins. He who desires sons gets them, and he who desires wealth becomes wealthy, by listening to the story of the coronation of Rama. The king conquers the whole world, after overcoming his enemies. Women who listen to this story will be blessed with children like Rama and his brothers. and they, too, will be blessed with long life, after listening to the Ramayana. He who listens to or reads this Ramayana propitiates Rama by this; Rama is pleased with him; and he indeed is the eternal lord Visnu.

Lava and Kusa said: Such is the glorious epic, Ramayana. May all recite it and thus augment the glory of dharma, of lord Visṇu. Righteous men should regularly listen to this story of Rama, which increases health, health, long-life, love, wisdom and vitality.

OM TAT SAT

END OF YUDDHA KANDAM

UTTARA KANDAM

1st NOVEMBER

Period after Coronation

tasmad devi dadamy adya putram atmasamaṁ tava

ubhayor vamšakartaram paulastya iti višrutam (2.31)

While Rama was ruling his kingdom, one day a deputation of several great sages waited upon him, with the sage Agastya at their head. Agastya said to the palace guard: "Pray, tell Rama that we the Ṛsis are eager to see him." at the request of Rama, the Ṛsis were immediately conducted to his presence.

The king received the sages with due honour. After they had been seated in the royal court, they said to Rama: "O Rama, we are well and happy. We consider ourselves fortunate that we see you well and happy. Fortunately, Ravana, the enemy of the world, has been slain by you. It is no wonder, O Rama, that you killed Ravana; when you take up arms you are capable of conquer- ing the three worlds. We are particularly happy that you despatched the son of Ravana. When we heard of the death of Indrajit who was invincible by all other beings in the universe, we rejoiced and we offer our special felicitations to you. That indeed was the most praiseworthy achievement. By this you have freed us all from great fear." Rama asked them: "Pray, O sages, tell me why you consider that victory over Indrajit as even more praiseworthy than victory over Ravana? How did he become so powerful?"

The sages replied: "Before we narrate the story of Indrajit, we shall have to narrate the story of Ravana. Hear, O Rama. In the Krta age, there was a brahmin-sage known as Pulastya; he was the son of God and was the peer of Brahma, the creator. He practised intense austerities in the hermitage of Tṛnavindu. In those days, the daughters of holy men and demi- gods used to sport in the vicinity of the hermitage. This disturbed Pulastya's austerities. He pronounced a curse: 'Whoever will come near me will become pregnant. Whoever knew of this curse avoided going near him. But the daughter of the royal sage Trnavindu did not know of this curse. One day she went in search of her friends. Pulastya was engaged in the recitation of the Vedas. The girl sat down near him to hear this. Soon, she noticed a change coming over her. Frightened, she ran to her father and in answer to his question told him what had happened. Trnavindu thereupon took her to Pulastya and offered her in marriage to Pulastya: 'Holy one, when you are fatigued on account of austerities, she will comfort you.'

"Pulastya accepted her. She served him with great love and devotion. Pleased with this, the sage said to her: 'I am delighted with your devoted service. I therefore bless you with this boon: you will give birth to a son who is equal to me in all respects, and will be known as PauLastya, and also Visrava since you conceived while listening to my recitation of the Vedas."

raksama iti ca yair ukttam raksasas te bhavantu vah

yakşama iti yair ukttam yaksa eva bhavantu vah (4.13)

"Pulastya's wife soon gave birth to a son and he was duly christened Visrava. The sage Bharadvaja heard of the noble virtues of Visrava and offered the hand of his daughter in marriage to the ascetic.

"Of them was born a radiant son. The grandfather Pulastya was highly delighted by the birth of this son whom he christened Vaisravana

"Vaisravana resolved to tread the path of virtue even while he was a mere boy. For, he thought: 'Dharma is indeed the noble path, hence I shall pursue dharma.' He engaged himself in in- tense austerities for a period of a thousand years. Brahma, the creator, and all the gods appeared before him and asked him to choose a boon. Vaisravana said: 'Lord, I wish to be a protector of the world and the guardian of the wealth of the world.' Pleased with this, Brahma replied: 'In fact, I myself had in- tended to appoint four protectors of the world, of whom three have already been chosen by me -- and they are Yama, Indra, and Varuna. You will indeed be the fourth protector of the world, and you will be the guardian of wealth. You will be equal to the gods in heaven.' Brahma also bestowed upon him the gift of an aerial vehicle, the Puspaka.

"Vaisravana returned home, sought his father's presence and requested him to indicate where he should dwell. Visrava replied: 'There is a mountain named Trikuta on the shores of the Southern Sea. On top of this mountain the divine architect Visvakarma has built a city called Lanka which is equal to the capital of heaven in splendour, for the dwelling of the demons. However, since the demons have fled that city for fear of lord Visnu, it remains uninhabited. I think you should make that your abode.' He obeyed."

In response to Rama's question concerning the origin of demons the sage Agastya said:

In the beginning Brahma created water, and then other beings. The latter, oppressed by hunger and thirst, prayed "Pray, tell us what to do?" Brahma said to them: "Protect by all means." Some of them responded: "We shall protect"; others said: "We shall worship." "They who said: ‘raksama (protect) will be demons," said Brahma, "and they who said yaksama (worship) will be demi-gods.

Among Raksasas arose two brothers Heti and Praheti. Heti's daughter-in-law was expecting a son; she prematurely induced the delivery, and discarding the baby on a hill, went away with her husband to enjoy herself. That baby began to cry. Rudra and Parvati happened to pass nearby and blessed that baby to reach instant adulthood. Parvati decreed: "Henceforth, demonesses will give birth the very moment after conception to babies who will become instant adults.

etam eva samudyogam puraskṛtya maharsayah

gacchadhvam šaranam visnum hanişyati sa tan prabhuh (6.11)

This boy was Sukesa who grew up to be a noble young man by the grace of the boon he had obtained from Rudra. In due time a Gandharva named Gramani gave him his daughter Devavati in marriage. She gave birth to three sons -- Malyavan, Sumali and Mali. These three demons immediately went to the forest and practised the most intense austerities, having come to know of the boons conferred upon their father by the Lord.

Pleased with their devotion and austerity, Brahma the creator granted them the boon they asked for which was "We should be invincible, long-lived, and united." The moment they realised the full significance of the boon they had thus obtained, they became fearless and began to oppress both the gods and the demons.

A celestial named Narmada had three daughters whom she gave in marriage to the three demons, and they gave birth to more demons.

The gods and the sages who were oppressed by these demons resorted to lord Rudra for protection. Rudra, however, said: "I cannot kill them, but I shall give you my counsel. Approach lord Viṣṇu abandoning all other activities; and take refuge in him. He will surely destroy all these demons." So they did. They narrated to him the atrocities of the demons. Lord Visnu consoled them and, after granting the boon of fearlessness, said: "I know

already that Sukeša is proud of having obtained a boon from Rudra. I also know the wrong-doing of his three sons. But, be free from anxiety; I shall surely destroy them all." The gods returned to their abode.

Malyavan had come to know of this and he informed his brothers of the plot of the gods. The other two brothers, how- ever, were undaunted by these stories. They were confident that no power in the universe could defeat them. Moreover, they said: "We have given no cause for the displeasure of lord Visnu; sure- ly, he has lost his head on account of the mischief of the gods. Hence, they sought to fight the gods.

Thousands upon thousands of the demons gathered in Lanka to wage a war against the gods. Ascending their own aircrafts, armed to the teeth with deadly weapons, protected by armours, these terrible looking demons all of whom were extremely powerful, flew towards heaven (the world of the gods.) Placing the three brothers at their head, and roaring with uncontrolled an- ger, they entered the abode of the gods.

Lord Visnu came to know of this invasion and soon he himself appeared on the battlefield, holding his divine weapons and riding his divine vehicle the Garuda who was as big as a mountain. The gods and the sages sang his glories. The demons surrounded him. He began to assail them with his divine weapons.

nasṭa dharma vyavasthata kale kale prajakarah

utpadyate dasyuvadhe saranagata vatsalah (8.27)

The demons rushed towards the holy hill known as Narayana Giri and closed in on lord Narayana or Visnu even as insects rush towards a flame. The Lord routed them by a shower of missiles and blew his powerful conch. This sound stupefied the demons; they could not stand and they were thoroughly confused. Lord Visnu destroyed the demons by their thousands.

Sumali came to the rescue of the harassed demons and shielded them from the might of the Lord. Lord Visnu fought back the demon and cut off his ear-rings and also his horses. The horses got out of the demon's control and ran in several directions, even like the senses of an uncontrolled man.

Mali rushed to his brother's aid. a fierce battle ensued between him and lord Visnu. The Lord's missile struck the demon and drank his blood as it were. Mali hit the Lord's vehicle Garuda and forced Garuda to turn away from the

battlefield, to the supreme delight of the demons. Unmindful of the discomfiture, lord Visnu hurled his discus which had the brilliance of the sun itself upon the demon Mali who fell dead instantly.

When Mali fell dead, Sumali and also Malyavan retired from the field and headed towards Lanka. Garuda in the meantime re-gained his vitality and drove to despair the demons by the force of the wind which emanated from his wings.

When lord Visnu pursued the fleeing army of the demons, Malyavan said to him: "Narayana! Do you not know the code of a warrior's conduct? Contrary to that code, why do you wish to kill those who have retired from the battle and who are there- fore non-combatants?" The Lord replied: "You are cruel, and the gods are living in fear of you. Their protection is dearer to me than my own life. Hence I shall destroy you wherever you are.

These words roused the anger of Malyavan who immediately attacked the Lord with his powerful weapons. The Lord received those missiles and hurled them back at the demon himself: grave- ly hurt by them, Malyavan was stunned for some time, though he soon regained his strength. He roared mightily and hit both Visnu and Garuda. In great fury, Garuda turned the full blast of wind against Malyavan who fled to Lanka. Seeing him retire to Lanka, Sumali also went away to Lanka. Unable to stand the supreme might of lord Visnu, the demons with Malyavan and Sumali at their head, went away to the netherworld, leaving Lanka in charge of the lord of wealth.

Whenever there is loss of dharma on earth, the Lord incarnates himself in order to destroy the demons and to re- store dharma.

bhagavan praninam nityam na 'nyatra maranad bhayam

na 'sti mrtyu samah satrur amaratvam aham vrne (1O.16)

Sumali reflected long and deeply over his position. He looked at his beautiful daughter who had attained marriageable age. He wondered whom she would obtain as her husband. A girl fills the families of her father, her mother and her husband with anxiety: the reputation of these families depended upon her right conduct. He therefore said to her: "Pray, seek the presence of Visrava, the son of sage Pulastya, and you yourself persuade him to be your husband."

Kaikasi immediately sought the presence of the sage Vis- rava who was then engaged in a great Vedic ritual. Upon conclu- sion of the rite, the sage asked her: "Who are you and why are you here?" Kaikasi replied: "I am Kaikasi, daughter of Sumali; why I am here, I am sure you will know by your own intuition." The sage contemplated for a while and divined the reason why she was there. He said to her: "Since you sought my presence at an inauspicious time when I was engaged in a fearsome rite, you will give birth to terrible sons of great cruelty, yet your last child will be noble and righteous, after me."

In due time, Kaikasi gave birth to a ten-headed child or a monster; the sage christened him Dasagriva. Then was born Kumbhakarna. After him the girl Surpanakha. Lastly was born the pious Vibhisana. They grew up rapidly.

One day, Vaisravana (also known as Kubera) came to visit his father Visrava, and Kaikasi introduced Dasagriva to him. The young boy became jealous of Kubera and resolved to excel him in every way. Thereupon all the three boys took to Austerities.

Kumbhakarna did the Pañcagni tapas in summer and stood in freezing water in winter. Vibhisana stood upon one leg for five thousand years. Dasagriva fasted for a thousand years after which he offered in sacrifice one of his heads; thus he had sacrificed nine heads. As he was about to offer the tenth, Bra- ma appeared before him and offered all of them a boon. "Ask for a boon," he said: "for your efforts should not go in vain." Dasagriva said: "Lord, all beings in this world are afraid of no- thing but death; there is no enemy like death; hence I ask for immortality. When Brahma said that it was impossible for created beings not to die, he modified his prayer by asking that he should not be killed by gods, demi-gods, demons, demons, etc., and contemptuously left out man. Vibhiṣana prayed: "May my mind not swerve from dharma even in the face of the worst danger." Be- fore offering a boon to Kumbhakarna Brahma asked the goddess of speech to ensure that he would not ask for a boon which might result in universal destruction. She entered into him and clouded his mind. He asked: "May I sleep many, many years." and Brahma granted them the boons of their choice.

dasagriva mahabaho na 'rhas tvam vaktum idṛsam

saubhratram na 'sti suranam srṇu ce 'dam vaco mama (11.14)

Sumali approached Dašagriva and said: "Luckily, young man, has the covetable boon been obtained by you, by which you will surely be the lord of the three worlds. We had to flee Laṇka on account of lord Viṣnu; and that fear has now left us. Lanka belongs to the demons; it is our territory. When we left, your brother Kubera occupied it. It is proper therefore that you should reclaim it from him, by negotiation, by persuasion or if necessary by violence."

Dasagriva's first reaction was negative; he said: "Kubera is my brother; how can I fight with him?" But Sumali's minister Prahasta replied: "There is no brotherly affection among heroes. In days of yore there were two sisters Diti and Aditi whose sons were demons and gods respectively. These brothers fought among themselves, and with the help of Visnu, the gods won and became lords of the worlds."

Dasagriva was convinced. He sent Prahasta himself as his emissary to claim Lanka from Kubera. Without hesitation Kubera said: "Indeed, Lanka was given to me as my abode by my father. But, pray, go to Dašagriva and tell him that from this moment Lanka is his." Dasagriva thus got Lanka without a fight.

Kubera went to his father Visrava and informed him of all this. The sage said to Kubera: "In fact, Dasagriva has mentioned this to me, and I scolded him for it. Since however you have left Lanka, please go to Kailasa which upholds the earth, and live there along with your people."

Dasagriva was crowned king of Lanka. Soon after that, he gave his sister Surpanakha in marriage to the demon Vidyutjihva After this, one day he went to the forest for hunting. There he met Maya, one of the sons of Diti, and enquired why he was thus roaming the forest. Maya replied: "Once upon a time, the gods gave me the nymph Hema with whom I enjoyed life for a long time. She left me about fourteen years ago, on the mission of the gods. Pining for her I am roaming this forest, along with this my daughter. I also have two sons by her, Mayavi and Dundubhi." Dasagriva revealed his identity. Maya offered him the hand of his daughter, Mandodari, in marriage and Dasagriva gladly accepted the offer.

Mandodari gave birth to a son who cried so loudly at birth that even Lanka shook: hence Dašagriva name him Meghanada.

For Vibhisana, Dasagriva obtained the daughter of the demi- god Sailusa, named Sarama. This girl was born on the banks of the Manasa lake. Her mother commanded the lake: "Saro ma vardhata" (Lake, do not swell); hence, the girl was named Sarama.

All of them lived in Lanka, enjoying their life.

sadhu paryaptam etavat krtas caritrasamgrahah

sadhu dharme vyavasthanaṁ kriyataṁ yadi sakyate (18)

At Kumbhakarna's request Daŝagriva had a palace built. Delighted, Kumbhakarna entered this palace and entered into a deep sleep for a very long period of time.

In the meantime, mighty Dašagriva commenced his campaign of destruction. He ravaged the gardens and playgrounds of the demi-gods. He uprooted their trees and polluted their rivers.

The chief of the demi-gods, Kubera, came to know of his brother's misdeeds, and full of familial concern, and wishing to dissuade him from further sinful pursuit, Kubera sent envoy to the court of Dasagriva with a message. The envoy was lovingly and honourably received by the noble Vibhisana and presented to Dasagriva, the king.

The envoy said: "O King, I have a message for you from your brother Kubera. Lend ear to it as I read it out to you: 'I think it is good that you should stop your destructive activities you have done enough in this direction. I also think that you should tread the path of dharma, if you can do so. I have seen the destruction of the celestial gardens which has been brought about by you; and I have also heard that you have killed many sages, and that you have been harassing the gods.

'You have spurned me on many occasions; yet, one does not disown a member of one's own family, even if he is guilty of an offence. I have retired to the Himalaya. There I performed intense austerities. Lord Siva was highly pleased with my austerities and appeared before me; and he said: "O Lord of wealth, I am highly pleased with your austerities and your devotion. As the fruit of your austerities I have come to regard you as a very dear friend; you have won this friendship by your devotion. Be my friend from now." When I returned to my abode after having thus been blessed by lord Siva, I

heard of your destructive pur- suits. Hence, I beseech you to abandon this course of conduct.'"

Hearing the words of the envoy, Dašagriva grew terribly angry. He clenched his fist and gnashed his teeth and shouted: "Neither you nor he is my well-wisher. Only a fool will boast of his friendship with lord Siva. Till now, O envoy, I felt that I should not harm my own brother. Having heard your words and his message, I feel I should abandon that resolve: I am ready to conquer the three worlds and despatch to the abode of Death all the lords of creation!" Saying so, Dasagriva cut off the head of the envoy and delivered the body to the demons to eat.

adhruve hi sarire yo na karoti tapo 'rjanam

sa pascat tapyate mudho mrto dṛṣṭva 'tmano gatim (15.23)

Dasagriva immediately gathered his ministers around him -- Mahodara, Prahasta, Marica, Suka, Sarana, and Dhumraksa. Sur-rounded by his demoniacal forces, he proceeded towards the abode of Kubera, as if he were ready to burn down the entire world. In a few hours he reached the abode known as Kailasa.

The sentries posted at the borders quickly informed Kubera that his own brother Dasagriva had invaded Kailasa. Kubera ordered the defence of Kailasa. There ensued a fierce battle between the demons and the demi-gods.

When Dasagriva forced entry into the palace, the guards stopped him and hit him with all their might; but the boon that he had obtained from the Creator made him immune to all these. When Dasagriva returned the blows, the demi-gods collapsed.

Seeing this, Kubera despatched the demi-god Manibhadra to defend Kailasa. In the meantime, Daŝagriva's lieutenants had felled thousands upon thousands of demi-gods: where is the righteous warfare of the demi-gods and where is the deceit and strength of the demons -- and what comparison is there between the two? Manibhadra was defeated.

Kubera stepped up and spoke to Dašagriva who, deluded by the boon of invincibility he had obtained from the Creator, was perpetrating the most sinful deeds: "O sinful one! You do not heed my wise counsel; but in course of time you will realise the evil consequences of your wicked actions. He

who insults his mother, father, the holy ones, and the teachers gets the fruits of such actions when he enters the abode of Death. With the help of this impermanent body, if one does not practise austerities (tapas) here, later that fool is burnt (tapyate) after Leaving this world. However, this is certain: everyone inevitably gets the fruit of his actions here."

Hearing these words, the lieutenants of Dasagriva turned away from battle. But, Dasagriva himself came forward to fight with Kubera. During that spectacular battle, when Kubera hurled the fire missile, Dasagriva neutralised it with the water mis- sile; Dasagriva assumed various forms and fought and defeated Kubera. When Kubera fell down, defeated, Dasagriva got hold of Kubera's vehicle the Puspaka (a spacecraft which could fly at the speed of thought, as it were, and which was built of precious jewels and metals and which was proof against heat and cold) and considering himself the conqueror of the three worlds, turned to go to his abode.

kim tv idanim maya sakyam hantum tvam he nišacara

na hantavyo hatas tvam hi purvam eva svakarmabhih (16.21)

While Dasagriva was returning to Lanka in the Puspaka suddenly, the spacecraft stalled. Dašagriva was bewildered. There appeared near the spacecraft a strange-looking being. It was dwarfish, bald, short-armed, but powerful. It was Nandi, the divine vehicle of lord Siva.

Nandi said to Daŝagriva: "Turn back, O Dasagriva. On yon- der mountain, lord Siva is sporting. No one is allowed to go beyond this point." Hearing these words and looking at the appearance of the strange creature, Dasagriva laughed derisively.

The angry Nandi cursed Dašagriva in the following words: "Because I have the face of a vanara, you have behaved thus with contempt towards me. Hence, in order to kill you, vanaras will be born, endowed with my strength and vitality, and with my form and equal to me in might. I could myself have killed you this very moment; but I do not do so, for you have destroyed your- self by your own evil actions." While Nandi was uttering these words, the gods and the sages sang the glories of the Lord and released a shower of flowers.

Dasagriva was terribly annoyed, and he proceeded to uproot the mountain itself, for it had stood as an obstacle to the smooth flight of his spacecraft.

The mountain shook; all the beings that dwelt on the mountain shook; even Parvati, the con- sort of lord Siva, was afraid. Seeing this, lord Siva playfully pressed the mountain down with his toes.

The mountain was stabilised. The pressure of lord Siva's toes was so great that Dasagriva's arms were caught underneath! Dasagriva yelled in pain. The gods, demi-gods, demons and sages were frightened to hear this thunderous sound. They came to Dasagriva and advised him to propitiate lord Siva and assured him, "The Lord is an ocean of mercy and he will surely bless you."

Dasagriva thereupon sang the glories of the Lord. Pleased with this, lord Siva appeared before him; released from the pressure of the mountain, Dasagriva rescued his arms. Lord Siva said to him: "I am pleased with your devotion. Since you cried aloud and your cry made all beings run in several directions, you will henceforth be called Ravana (ravahnoise). "Dasagriva prayed to lord Siva for other boons: "Pray, grant me the boon that I would not be killed by anyone except a human being: I am not afraid of a human being. Also, please bestow upon me a di- vine weapon which I may use in war." The Lord conferred these boons upon Ravana and gave him a divine sword known as Candrahasam. Ravana returned to his abode.

yasmat tu dharşita ca 'ham tvaya papatmana vane

tasmat tava vadhartham hi samutpatsye hy aham punah (17.32)

While roaming the forest, one day, Ravana saw a beautiful young woman in the garb of an ascetic. He' was filled with passion for her. He approached her and asked: "Who are you, O beautiful woman? You are young and you have the appearance of an ascetic: these two are contradictory!"

The girl replied: "I am the daughter of the royal sage Kusadhvaja who was the son of Brhaspati. My father instructed me in the recitation of the Vedas; and I was known as Vedavati. Many gods and demi-gods sought my hand. But my father desired to have lord Vişnu as his son-in-law and no one else. Hearing this, a demon named Sambhu killed my father, and my mother, too, ascended the funeral pyre after her husband. Since then I am engaged in intense austerities in order to fulfil my father's desire and attain lord Vişṇu as my husband."

Ravana introduced himself and boasted: "What is this Viṣnu before me? Come, become my wife and enjoy life." Ravana grabbed her by her hair. Greatly enraged at this behaviour, Vedavati cursed Ravana in the following words: "I do not wish to preserve this body which has been touched by you; I shall therefore enter into the sacred fire. O sinful one, since you touched me, and thus caused my death, I shall be reborn for your destruction. If there is any merit left in me, I shall be reborn without being conceived by a woman." Saying so, she entered into the sacred fire. That Vedavati is Sita, your wife, O Lord, and you are lord Viṣṇu himself.

Later, Ravana came to a place where a king Marutta was per- forming a sacred rite assisted by the sage Samvartta, the son of Brhaspati. When they saw him, all the gods disguised them- selves: Indra became a peacock, Yama became a crow, Kubera became a lizard, and Varuna became a swan.

Ravana challenged Marutta who was about to fight; but the preceptor reminded Marutta: "If you leave the rite incomplete then your family will perish; moreover, since you have under- taken this sacred rite, you shall not engage in fighting." He kept quiet. The demons declared Ravana victorious. Ravana ate up all the sages in the place and went away. The gods, pleased at having so cleverly escaped the wrath of Ravana, conferred boons on the animals whose forms they had assumed: thenceforth the peacock had eyes on its feathers, the crow was granted freedom from the pangs of death, the lizard got golden hue, and the swan its pure white colour.

na hy aham nirjito raksas tvaya ca 'tmaprasamsina

kalenai 'va vipanno 'ham hetubhutas tu me bhavan (19.28)

After the victory in the rite of the king Marutta, Ravana continued to roam the world, eager to defeat all the kings of the world. Most of them yielded to his claim without as much as a challenge.

In course of time, Ravana reached ayodhya, and there he challenged the king anaranya who however accepted the challenge and fought with Ravana. There ensued fierce fighting between the two. Ravana destroyed the best part of anaranya's forces; while the latter routed Ravana's lieutenants. In fierce rage, Ravana delivered a mighty blow on anaranya's head, and the latter fell from his vehicle. As if smiling, Ravana said: "What have you done, O King? In all the three worlds there is no one who is my equal in a

hand to hand fight." anaranya replied: "What can I do, O demon: for Time is indeed supreme, and I have to bow to the inevitable. I have not been defeated by you, but by Time alone have I been defeated, and you have merely served as an excuse. But, I tell you this: in my own dynasty will arise a prince, Rama son of Dasaratha, who will avenge my death and will bring about your destruction." Saying this, anaranya ascended to heaven, and Ravana continued his exploits.

Seeing the wanton destruction of human beings by Ravana, the sage Narada approached him, and said to him: "O king of demons, you have earned the extremely rare boon of invincibility by gods, demi-gods and demons. Listen, I would like to offer a piece of advice to you. The world of human beings is subject to death; why then do you indulge in killing these human beings? Is it not waste of time killing these foolish human beings who are already subject to old age, disease and death? Surely, all these beings have to enter the abode of Yama, the lord of death. Therefore, challenge Yama himself. If you conquer Yama, all other beings are automatically conquered. "

Narada's reasoning appealed to Ravana and he immediately set out to go to the abode of Yama. He said to Narada: "Indeed, I shall be able to destroy even the Lords of creation." After he had left, the sage was intrigued: all beings are afraid of death and no one can conquer death; what could Ravana do to Yama? He, too, proceeded immediately to the abode of Yama.

yadi hy asmin nipatite na mriyet aişa raksasah

mriyate va dasagrivas tada hy ubhayato 'nṛtam (22.46)

Narada said to Yama: "The demon named Dasagriva is coming to defeat you who are extremely difficult to overcome. Hence I have come here, too." Even while he was saying this, the sound of Ravana's spacecraft descending nearby was heard.

In the light shed by the spacecraft, Ravana himself beheld with his own eyes the fate of the evil-doers, sinners as also the pious people's fate. He saw how the sinners were tortured in hell. He also saw how the pious people rejoiced in heavenly abodes.

Forcibly, he had the sinners released from the grip of the servants of Yama; and they rejoiced exceedingly. But the servants of Yama were annoyed and they fought with Ravana. And, Ravana discharged a volley of the most

powerful missiles: stand- ing on bare ground, he used the most powerful missile known as Pasupata which came as a blazing fire surrounded by smoke. The servants of Yama were falling in great numbers.

Yama heard the pitiable cries of his own servants, and he surmised that they were suffering defeat at the hands of Ravana. He emerged from his court, preceded by Death in its own form, and armed with various infallible missiles. Seeing Yama emerge in great anger, all beings in the whole universe trembled in great fear.

Ravana was the only one who was unafraid. Approaching Yama, Ravana hit him with various weapons; and Yama in his turn assailed Ravana with various weapons. Thus they fought for seven days and nights. Ravana hurled several powerful missiles at Yama. Seeing this, Death spoke to Yama: "Pray, give me leave to destroy this wicked demon. No one who comes within my sight ever survives even for an hour."

Yama replied: "Stay, now see my prowess." Saying so, Yama lifted up the most powerful weapon known as kala-danda, the very sight of which kills all beings. Just at that moment Brahma the creator appeared on the scene and pacified Yama with the following words: "Yama, you should not kill Ravana who is protected by my boon. Put the kala-danda away. It is infallible. If you use it against Ravana, after that, whether he survives the blow or dies of it, my word would have been proved false." In obedience to Brahma's advice, Yama put the kala-danda away. Yama could not be defeated either. So, he merely vanished from the spot. Considering himself the victor, Ravana ascended the Puspaka and went his way.

tasmad vai strikṛtenai 'va prapsyate durmatir vadham

satibhir varanaribhir evam vakye 'bhyudirite (24.21)

Next, Ravana conquered the Nagas. He then went to where the Nivatakavacas dwelt. They, too, had a boon from Brahma the creator and so had been specially favoured by him. Ravana went to them and invited them for a fight. The two forces were en- gaged in a battle for over a year, but neither could win.

Brahma the creator appeared on the scene and said to the Nivatakavacas: "You cannot conquer this Ravana in battle. I think it is a good idea for you to be united in mutual friend- ship. It is only through friendship that people

can attain prosperity." Thereupon, Ravana concluded friendship with the Nivatakavacas, with the sacred fire as the witness.

Emerging from there, Ravana encountered the beings known as Kalakeyas. In a fight with them, Ravana lost his brother- in-law Vidyutjihva (husband of Surpanakha) and also very many of his soldiers. But Ravana exterminated the Kalakeyas.

From there he went to the abode of Varuna. Though he was met there by the sons of Varuna who gave him a good fight, they said to him that Varuna himself had gone away to the court of Brahma the creator to listen to a music concert. However, since he had defeated the sons of Varuna, Ravana considered himself the world-conqueror and returned to Lanka.

Wherever he went, whenever he saw a beautiful girl, Ravana abducted her and carried her away. Thus very many girls had been forcibly carried away by him. Nagas, celestial musicians, daughters of sages, demonesses and goddesses -- the Puspaka had carried all of them, and had been flooded by their tears. All of them wailed: "This indeed is incomparable sin--the violation of the wives of others and Ravana revels in it. Therefore, he will die on account of a woman.

When he re-entered Lanka, he found that his sister Surpanakha was inconsolable with grief. On enquiry, she said: "O King, you are the cause of my widowhood; you are responsible for the death of my husband. You are supposed to protect me; but in fact you have ruined my life." Ravana calmly replied to her: "Your husband was killed in battle, and I did not intend that he should die. Anyhow, all that is past. I shall do every- thing to please you now. Go and live with our brother Khara and all the fourteen thousand soldiers of his army will be like brothers to you. You will be like their mother."

na hi 'dṛsam bhayam kimcit kulastriṇam iho 'cyate

bhayanam api sarvesam vaidhavyam vyasanam mahat (42)

A little later, Ravana entered one of the pleasure-gardens of Lanka, named Nikumbhila. There he saw his own son Meghanada engaged in an elaborate religious rite. He also saw that Meghanada was clad in deer-skin and bore the appearance of one en- gaged in an orthodox religious rite. He fondly

embraced his son and then asked him: "What is this that you are doing, my son?"

The officiating priest Ušana replied: "Sir, your son has successfully completed these seven sacred rites -- agnisṭoma, asvamedha, bahusuvarnakah, rajasuya, gomedha,vaisnava and mahe- svara. And he has earned the blessings of the lord Siva himself, by which he will be able to move about at will, fly in the air, and also perform many magical tricks."

Ravana expressed a slight displeasure thus: "all this is unworthy of you, my son; you have been offering sacrifice to our enemies, the gods. However, whatever you have done is well- done. Let us go home."

On reaching his palace, Ravana brought down from the Puşpaka the numerous women whom he had abducted. Seeing them, Vibhisana was sore distressed and gently admonished his elder brother: "Surely, it is sinful to thus abduct others' wives. We shall have to pay dearly for this sin. And it is already evident! Brother, our cousin sister Kumbhinasi has been abducted by the demon Madhu. Surely, this is directly connected with the sin of your abducting these good women. Meghanada was engaged in the sacred rite; I was engaged in meditation, and Kumbhakarna was in deep sleep. Madhu took Kumbhinasi away. When I heard, I thought that perhaps they were a good match for each other."

But, Ravana reacted differently. He ordered the army to get ready to invade the territory of Madhu. He even had Kumbhakarna awakened. With all of them -- except Vibhisapa who looked after Lanka in the absence of the other brothers -- he invaded Madhupura.

Ravana could not see Madhu. However, Kumbhinasi rushed towards Ravana and fell at his feet and cried. She pleaded with him: "Pray, grant me this boon -- that you will not make me a widow. To a good woman there is no greater misfortune than widowhood; it is the greatest cause for fear and sorrow." Ravana agreed to spare Madhu's life. Whereupon Kumbhinasi went inside and awakened her sleeping husband.

She introduced Ravana to Madhu: "Here is my brother, Ravana, who needs your help in his fight with the gods." Madhu received Ravana with great affection and hospitality.

yada hy akamam kamarto dharşayisyati yoşitam

murdha tu saptadha tasya sakalibhavita tada (56)

On a full moon night Ravana was resting on mount Kailasa. The armed forces were asleep. The full moon and the cool breeze, the fragrance of the wild flowers and the music of the love- intoxicated celestials roused his own passion.

At the same time, there appeared on the scene a celestial nymph named Rambha. She was seductively dressed; her looks and her gait were such as to rouse the onlooker's passion. Ravana approached her and questioned: "Where are you going, O beautiful woman? Who is that most fortunate person who is going to enjoy sensual pleasure with you today? Nay, do not go away leaving me here. Come, let us enjoy ourselves. Who is equal to me in the three worlds?"

Thus accosted by Ravana, Rambha began to tremble in fear. She said: "Be gracious to me, O Lord! You are the protector of all; will you not protect your own daughter-in-law? I am going to meet your own brother's son Nalakübara, and therefore I am your daughter-in-law. Pray, let me go."

But, Ravana was in no mood to listen to this sermon. Over- come by lust, he grabbed Rambha and violated her. After this violation, when he released her, Rambha was like a soiled gar- land or muddied water.

Still shaking with fear and shame, she approached Nala- kubara and narrated to him all that had happened to her on the way. She fell at his feet, weeping. She craved his pardon.

Nalakübara went into deep meditation for a while, when he heard that Ravana had dared to violate Rambha. He saw' all that had happened to Rambha. Overcome with great anger, he took water in his hands and pronounced the following terrible curse: "Since he violated you, O Rambha, who did not desire him, he will not be able to enjoy any woman who does not desire him. If he should ever try to violate a woman who does not desire him, his head will break into seven pieces.

As Nalakubara pronounced this terrible curse, the gods right from Brahma the creator were delighted and they rained a shower of flowers.

When Ravana came to know of this unfailing curse, he began to refrain from molesting any woman who did not desire him.

na tavad eṣa duṣṭatma šakyo jetum sura 'suraih

hantum ca 'pi samasadya varadanena durjayah (27.15)

Ravana turned his eyes upon heaven and decided to conquer the heaven, too. He entered the realm of the gods with his mighty army. The heavens shook, and bewildered Indra shook on his throne. He ordered all the gods to get ready to fight Ravana.

Indra, the god of heaven, then approached lord Visnu trembling with fear. Humbly he submitted to lord Viṣṇu as follows: "Pray, O Lord, tell us what we should do. Ravana, who considers himself invincible on account of the boons he has gained, has come here to give us battle. You are our only refuge, our only strength and support. You are the supreme Lord, and in you are the worlds established. In you the universe has its origin and to you it returns. Pray, tell me what you would like us to do with this Ravana."

Lord Visnu replied: "Ravana's misdeeds are already known to me. But I shall not now engage Ravana in battle. I, Viṣnu, can never return from the battlefield without killing the enemy; but this is impossible now since Ravana is protected by the boon he has gained from Brahma. However, I promise that soon I shall destroy him for the redemption of the gods. Hence, you yourself give him battle, along with the gods for the present."

All the gods marched out to the battlefield with Indra at their head; and at the same time the demons with Ravana at their head marched into heaven.

In the meantime, the mighty demon Sumali also entered the battlefield. He wrought great destruction among the forces of the gods. The eight Vasu known as Savitra, destroyed the vehicle of Sumali, Wielding an extremely powerful missile known as gada, the Vasu hit Sumali with it. The fire that the missile emitted entirely consumed the demon. The demons fled in all directions, seeing that Sumali their leader had been killed.

Meghanada now took the field. Indra consoled the gods by saying: "Fear not: there you see my son Jayanta proceeding to the field, to face Meghanada." The battle between Meghanada and Jayanta was exceedingly fierce. When Meghanada used his magic power, there was utter confusion, and the gods even killed other gods!

Indra himself entered the battlefield in his celestial spacecraft. The battle rose to a new peak with Kumbhakarna and other demon-warriors fighting to their very best. There was great destruction on both sides.

na 'sti sarvamaratvam hi kasyacit pranino bhuvi

catuspadah pakşiṇas ca bhutanaṁ va mahaujasam (30.12)

During that fearsome battle, once Indra surrounded Ravana with the divine forces. Hearing of this, Meghanada rushed to the scene. He used his magic powers. No one could see Meghanada. He bound Indra by his deluding power and took him prisoner. He turned to his father, Ravana, and said: "Come, let us go home: I have captured Indra himself."

The gods, with Brahma the creator himself at their head, went to Lanka. Brahma pleaded with Ravana: "Highly praiseworthy is your son's valour. Since by him Indra himself was conquered, he will henceforth be known as Indrajit. Let Indra be freed so that he can continue his function in heaven. Let Indrajit choose any boon in return.

Highly pleased with this, Indrajit asked for the boon of "Immortality. Brahma pointed out: immortality is impossible in this mortal world, either for birds, beasts or other beings. Hence, please modify your request." Indrajit responded: "I shall regularly perform the sacred rites before undertaking an important task. If I complete them in time, I should be invincible; if I do not I should be vulnerable. And, As long as I am seated in my vehicle, I should also be invulnerable." Brahma granted him the boon. Indrajit said: "People "People seek to become immortal through austerities and by propitiating the gods; but I shall become immortal by self-effort and vigilance.

Indra was freed from captivity. Brahma said to him: "I shall narrate to you the reason why you were thus taken captive. In the beginning, I created all beings, and I created them all equal of the same colour and of the same form. I then contemplated my own creation and I desired to create a special being. I wished to ensure that this special being would be absolutely flawless (a: without, halya: flaw). This was a woman, and she was Ahalya. She became the wife of Gautama, the sage. Once, overcome by passion for her, you seduced her in the absence of her husband Gautama. The sage surprised both of you; and, when he discovered the mischief you were up to, he cursed you:

"Because my wife was thus seduced fearlessly by you, you will be taken captive by your enemy." He also cursed his own wife: "Because you were proud of your beauty and did this, you will not be the only beautiful woman in the world and thus lose your uniqueness. Hence, remember your own misdeed, O Indra; by your own misdeed you were defeated, not by anyone else. Immediately adore the Lord through the sacred Vaisnava rite, and by that will you be purified of all sin. "Indra followed Brahma's advice.

tatah satam arti haram param varam varapradam candramayukha bhusanam

samarcayitva sa nišacaro jagau prasarya hastan prananarta ca 'gratah (31.44)

Once, Ravana went to the city named Mahismati the capital of the Haihaya kingdom whose ruler was Kartavirya arjuna. He shouted: "Who is that arjuna who rules this city?" He was told that arjuna was sporting in the river Narmada.

Immediately Ravana proceeded to the river Narmada. After his bath, Ravana adored the Lord through the Linga which he placed on the sands.

Ravana then noticed an inexplicable phenomenon: the flow of the river had suddenly been arrested. Through his spies, he learnt that Kartavirya arjuna, who was sporting with women in the stream, had dammed the river with his own bare hands and created an artificial lake for his pleasure Hearing this,. Ravana wished to challenge Kartavirya Arjuna for a fight. The latter's ministers, however, prayed that Ravana should accept their hospitality, spend the night there and challenge the king the next morning. They argued: "It is not heroic to challenge a warrior who is frolicking with women!"

Ravana was inclined to agree. However, at the same time, his forces had already begun to fight with the forces of Kart-avirya arjuna, and they raised a great hue and cry: Ravana's foremost lieutenants joined the fight. Kartavirya Arjuna's ministers informed him of the battle. And he too rushed to the battle.

A fierce fighting ensued. Kartavirya Arjuna delivered a powerful blow with his gada and rendered Prahasta senseless. All the other demons and Ravana too rushed to help Prahasta. Kartavirya Arjuna then directed his attention to Ravana. With great ease, he caught hold of Ravana. And he bound Ravana, even as Narayana bound the demon king Bali. At that time, the gods and the

demi-gods released a shower of flowers saying: "Well done." The demons vainly shouted: "Release him, release him."

The sage Pulastya heard of Ravana's capture through the gods, and he came in person to intercede with Kartavirya Arjuna The latter received the sage with due honour and reverence, and after prayerfully offering his hospitality asked the sage: "What can I do for you, O holy one?" The sage praised Kartavirya Arjuna's prowess and prayed that his son Ravana might be released from captivity. Kartavirya Arjuna did so immediately.

darah putrah puram rastram bhoga 'cchadana bhojanam

sarvam eva 'vibhakttam nau bhavisyati harisvara (41)

Undaunted by the ignominy sustained at the hands of Kartavirya Arjuna, Ravana continued to roam the world in search of fresh fight and fresh conquest.

Once he reached the kingdom of Kişkindha, ruled over by the vanara Vali of great prowess. He loudly hurled a challenge at Vali to come forward and fight with him. Vali's minister, how- his ever, informed Ravana that Vali had gone out of his capital. city in order to perform the daily evening worship. "If you care to wait for a little while, you can see him, surely," he said. "But I might just as well forewarn you! Do you see that mountain of bones: they belonged to other heroes who similarly challenged Vali. Even if you have drunk the nectar of immortality, its effect lasts only till you confront Vali. If you are in a hurry to die. Then go to the Southern Ocean where you will behold Vali."

Ravana was not impressed by this threat. He ascended the Puspaka and headed southwards. He saw Vali there engaged in offering his evening prayers. He approached Vali without making the least sound. Accidentally, Vali saw him, too. Without much ado, Vali engulfed Ravana in his armpit and leapt in the air. The other demons wailed aloud and pursued Vali, in vain.

After going to the oceans in the four directions and offering his prayers at each of those oceans, with Ravana still held in his armpit, Vali returned to Kişkindha. There, in the garden, Vali dropped Ravana. Then he asked Ravana: "From where did you come?"

Ravana then said to Vali: "What strength; what prowess; and what majesty! Amazing that someone could hold me in his grip like a small animal and carry me to the four oceans in the four quarters. You are indeed a supreme hero. Having thus witnessed your extraordinary might, I wish to conclude a treaty of friendship with you. Henceforth, we shall enjoy undivided between ourselves, i.e. in common, wives, sons, cities, kingdom, pleasures, shelter and food.

Then they raised the sacred fire and in front of it held each other's hands and concluded a treaty of friendship. Ravana dwelt in the abode of Vali for a month, enjoying his hospitality and then returned to his own abode.

Such was the prowess of Vali, O Rama, whom you killed very easily. Thus concluded the sage Agastya.

etasya bahu viryeṇa laika sita ca laksmanah

prapta maya jayas cai 'va rajyam mitrani bandhavah (35.9)

Rama said to Agastya: "Wonderful is your description of the strength of Vali and Ravana. But surely Hanuman was more powerful than all these heroes. I have attained Lanka, sita, victory, friendship and also the Kingdom, all on account of the strength of Hanuman; but for him we might not even have known the whereabouts of Sita. Yet, how was it that he could not kill Vali or Ravana or the others?"

Agastya replied: If it is your will I shall narrate the story of Hanuman in detail. On the hill known as Sumeru there was a king known as Kesari whose wife was Anjana. Of her Hanuman was born as the son of the wind-god. While she had gone away to bring fruits for his food, the baby mistook the sun for a fruit, and sprang up in the sky to pick it. Though the baby was close to the sun, the latter did not wish to burn the innocent baby. At Rahu's complaint, Indra intervened and struck the baby who fell down on the earth: as he fell, his chin was broken and hence he came to be known as Hanuman.

Seeing this the wind-god grew angry and withdrew himself from the world. No one could breathe. All beings thereupon sang the praises of the wind-god and sought to propitiate him. All of them, with Brahma himself, waited upon him. Vayu the wind-god emerged from the cave with the unconscious baby. At the touch of the Creator the baby was revived. The wind-god once again began to move amongst beings, as their life.

All the gods then glorified Hanuman and gave him all kinds of boons: health, freedom from illness, a very long life, invincibility when assailed by the thunderbolt and such other weapons, the gift of a powerful gada, the ability to change his form and roam where he liked, etc.

Blessed with these boons, Hanuman had lost his head, and began to ravage the forests, hermitages of the sages and even the sages themselves. The sages knew that he was invincible and that he enjoyed the divine protection of the boons that the gods had bestowed upon him. Hence, they pronounced a curse: "You harass us, depending upon your great strength; you will not be aware of your strength for a long time from now." and, realising the great role he had to play in your service, they modified the curse thus: "When you are reminded of your strength, however, you will regain it."

Hence, though he was on the side of Sugriva In his fight with Vali, he did not remember his strength. It is only for your sake that Hanuman was born in this world, and the gods created him.

After narrating all these stories, Agastya and the sages took leave of Rama.

hato duratma durbuddhi ravano raksasadhamah

hetumatram aham tatra bhavatam tejasa hatah (38.24)

The day after Rama's coronation, the bards of the court sweetly sang his glories in order to rouse him from sleep: "Lord, if you sleep the whole world will sleep, too. Hence, wake up." Rama woke up and after performing his ablutions worshipped the holy ones and God.

The kings and other honoured guests who had come to witness the coronation left Ayodhya one by one, after being duly honoured by Rama. Rama said to them: "The wicked Ravana was killed in truth by dharma, truth, and righteousness, and the spiritual glory of which you are embodiments: I was a mere instrument, an excuse." They in their turn praised him and considered themselves fortunate and blessed indeed.

Rama bestowed gifts of precious jewels upon the vanara chiefs who had helped him in the great battle with Ravana and who had come to Ayodhya to witness the coronation. They enjoyed their stay in Ayodhya; a month passed by as if it were but an hour. Rama was happy in their company, too.

Rama then gave leave to Sugriva and the other vanara leaders to depart and return to their own realm. He gave leave to Vibhisana to return to Lanka, and "rule Lanka in accordance with the code of dharma." He emphasised: "May your mind never seek unrighteous behaviour, O King of Lanka; wise men adhere to the path of dharma and thus enjoy the rulership of the kingdom for a long time."

Hanuman then bowed to Rama and offered the following prayer: "Lord, may there be in me supreme devotion to you; may my heart never waver in its devotion. And, may I live just so long as your story and your glory are sung in this world."

Rama said: "Even so be it, O Hanuman. My stories shall be narrated in this world so long as the world lasts; and your glory will endure so long as my stories are narrated in this world. For just one of the great services you have rendered to me, I am bound to give you my very life; for the numerous others I shall ever remain indebted to you. One who has received help reciprocates in times of the other's difficulties: but I wish that you may never stand in need of my help, and that you may never find yourself in difficulty." Saying so, Rama embraced Hanuman and bestowed upon him the precious gift of a necklace he himself had worn around his neck.

All the vanara and other chiefs then tearfully took leave of Rama.

anamayas ca sattvanaṁ sagro maso gato hy ayam

jirnanam api sattvanaṁ mrtyur nayati raghava

aroga prasava naryo vapusmanto hi manavah (41.19)

One day, while Rama was sitting with his brothers, he heard an ethereal voice. It said: "Rama, I am the spacecraft Puspaka. At your command, I went to the abode of Kubera. But he has returned me to you, since you conquered Lanka and destroyed the wicked Ravana. Kubera is highly pleased to hear of your victory and he prays that you should use this Puspaka spacecraft to move about in this world. Hence I have come back to you. Pray, accept my services."

Rama worshipped the spacecraft and then commanded it thus: "Very well, go where you like now, and return to me when I shall think of you."

Bharata marvelled at the supernormal powers of Rama, and said to him: "Brother, even inanimate things become sentient beings in your presence. People in your kingdom are free from illness; life-span is prolonged. Infant mortality is unknown. Everyone enjoys good health. And even the rain and the wind favour you. People are saying among themselves: "May we have such a ruler for all time to come." Rama was pleased to hear this.

Later in the day, Rama entered the asoka-grove along with Sita. This lovely garden was full of fragrant flowers and love- ly green lawns, and in it also dwelt beautiful birds whose songs delighted the listeners.

Rama and Sita seated themselves in that garden. With the greatest of love and affection, Rama himself handed to Sita the sweet drink known as maireyakam. Soon, the servants brought there well cooked meat and various other delicacies. The royal attendants entertained Rama and Sita with music and dance.

Thus, Rama spent the forenoon in the affairs of the royal court; and the evenings he spent in the company of his wife. Sita, too, spent the forenoon in the service of her mother's-in- law and the afternoons with her beloved husband.

One day, Rama said to Sita: "I see that you are expecting a baby, my dear: tell me, what can I do for you to make you happy during this auspicious period." Sita replied: "Lord, my only desire is to revisit the forests and the sacred hermitages of the holy ones on the banks of the holy river Ganga." Rama immediately replied: "Certainly and we shall go tomorrow itself."

apy aham jivitam jahyam yuşman va purusarsabhah

apavada bhayad bhitah kim punar janakatmajam (45.15)

In Rama's court, the clowns were entertaining Rama and the other princes and dignitaries with humorous stories. Later, Rama asked the spies and secret agents: "Tell me, what do people say about me, about Sita, about my brothers? Tell me everything without any reservation."

After much hesitation Bhadra conveyed to the king what some citizens were saying: "Rama has done what no one else has done: he built a bridge over the ocean, went over to Lanka with the vanara forces and others, killed Ravana and regained Sita. I do not know how he still loves Sita so much, after her abduction by Ravana who placed her on his lap and kept her in the

Asoka forest for such a long time. Well, well, I suppose that on the part of our hereafter we cannot object to such conduct wives, too."

Rama's face showed deep concern and anxiety. He dismissed the court, and asked his messengers to request his brothers to come to his presence at once. Thus urgently summoned, the three brothers rushed to the court and were bewildered to see Rama's anxious face. They bowed to him and stood respectfully at a distance.

Rama gravely turned towards them and said as follows: "Pray, listen to what I have just heard. Public scandal is eating my heart. For I belong to the great Iksvaku dynasty. Sita, too, belongs to a respectable family. You know how she was abducted by Ravana from the Dandaka forest and how I eventually regained her. In order to convince me of her purity, Sita even entered the fire; Laksmana, you were witness to the declaration by the fire-god himself that Sita is pure. In my own innermost being I know she is pure. Hence I brought her back to Ayodhya with me.

"Yet, there is public scandal concerning her. He who is thus subjected to public scandal in this world goes down to the lower worlds so long as the scandal lasts. Infamy is ridiculed by the gods, and fame is adored in this world. Indeed it is for the sake of fame that people undertake various activities. For fear of scandal I can even give up my life and all of you, my dear brothers; what to speak of Sita? Hence, do as I tell you and do not even counsel me against it. Take Sita immediately and leave her in a far-off place: take her to the hermitage of the sage Valmiki and leave her there. In fact, she herself wanted to go to visit those hermitages.

"I swear by my own feet, I will not change my mind, and please do not even try to make me change my mind."

sa tvaṁ tyakt ta nṛpatina nirdosa mama sannidhau

paura 'pavada bhitena grahyaṁ devi na te 'nyatha (47.14)

When that night was past and the next day dawned, Laksmana asked Sumantra to get ready the royal chariot. When the chariot was ready, Laksmana said to Sita: "You had requested the king Rama to let you visit the hermitages of the sages on the banks of the river Ganga. The king has been graciously pleased to accede to that request and has commanded me to take you thither. Hence, O Sita, ascend this chariot."

With a joyous heart, Sita ran into her apartments, gathered clothes and jewels and other presents which she wished to give the sages and their consorts, and returned to where the chariot stood ready. The chariot sped forward.

However, Sita noticed ill omens and was anxious on account of her husband and her mothers-in-law: she offered a prayer for their safety.

They spent the first night on the bank of the river Gautami in an Asrama. The next morning they continued the journey. When they neared the river Ganga, Laksmana looking at the river wailed aloud, to the surprise of Sita. She asked him: "Why do you cry thus, O Laksmana? Surely, because you miss your brother Rama so much. So do I. We shall visit the hermit- ages and spend tonight there and return to Ayodhya as soon as possible.

Sita and Laksmana got into the ferry to cross the river Ganga. Laksmana began to weep and wail once again. He said to Sita: "My heart is heavy, O Sita. I know that the world will blame me for this. In fact, I would have preferred death at this very moment. Be gracious, for it is not my fault." Saying so, he fell at the feet of Sita, weeping bitterly.

Sita grew anxious and was greatly worried. She requested Laksmana to tell her everything without reserve. Laksmana got up and continued to address Sita: "In the presence of the members of his assembly, Rama heard a terrible public scandal. It is something which the citizens of Ayodhya and the country are saying. Rama was greatly upset and he told me something and retired to his apartment. I cannot repeat those words to you. It is on account of that scandal that the king has decided to abandon you. Pray, bear in mind that he does not accuse you, but he is afraid of public scandal. This is the command of the king: I should take you to the hermitage of the sage Valmiki and leave you there. The sage is a great friend of our father and he will surely look after you very well."

patir hi devata naryah patir bandhuh patir guruh

pranair api priyam tasmad bhartuh karyam visesatah (48.18)

When Sita heard Laksmana's terrible words, she fainted, overwhelmed by grief. After a considerable time, she regained consciousness and in a sorrowful tone spoke to Laksmana thus:

"My body has surely been created for suffering; and I am an embodiment of endless suffering. What great sin should I have committed in a previous birth, and whom did I deprive of his spouse, that I should be subjected to this fate though I am pure and innocent? Earlier in life I lived in the forest, but then I had my lord Rama with me. Now deprived of him how shall I live in this forest?

"When I enter the hermitages of these sages, what shall I tell them; for what reason have I been banished by Rama? It would have been better for me to drown myself in the Ganga; but my lord would accuse me of having destroyed his dynasty, for I am with his child.

"O Laksmana, do as you have been commanded by the Lord to do. When you return to Ayodhya, convey my prostrations to lord Rama and also to my mothers-in-law, and assure him of my eternal devotion to him, of my purity. I am quite sure that I have been thus banished only on account of public scandal and not because my lord suspects my chastity. Indeed, the husband is the god, relative and guru for a chaste woman; he is dearer to her than even her life; hence his mission is all-important to her. It is in this spirit that I give you Leave: you may now go." When he went out of sight, Sita burst into tears, sitting on the bank of the Ganga.

Valmiki came to the bank of the Ganga and greeted sita with due respect and honour. He said: "I know that you are sita, the daughter of king Janaka and the daughter-in-law of Dasaratha; you are the beloved queen of Rama. I knew that you would be coming; and I also know the reason why you are here. By the eye of intuition gained by the practice of intense austerities I know that you are utterly chaste. I know all that happens in the three worlds, Come: at a little little distance from here you will see a convent of female ascetics who will look after you from now on. Grieve not. Treat this as your own home."

Valmiki led Sita to the hermitage of the female ascetics and introduced her to them and entrusted her care to them.

yasmad avadhyam me patnim avadhih krodhamurchitah

tasmat tvam manuse loke janisyasi janardana

tatra patniviyogam tvaṁ prapsyase bahu varsikaṁ (51.15)

When Laksmana saw that Sita had duly entered the hermitage of the sage Valmiki, he was afflicted by grief and said to the driver of the chariot, Sumantra: "Behold, O Sumantra, he who conquered the gods, demi-gods and the demons, himself suffers such misfortune. Previously, he was banished from his kingdom. And now he is separated from his beloved wife on account of public scandal. This action appears to me to be improper."

Hearing all this, Sumantra replied: "O Laksmana, all this was known to the holy ones long ago. and one day the sage Durvasa told all this to your father king Dasaratha -- that Rama would undergo a lot of suffering, that he would banish Sita, and later you, too. The king warned me not to reveal this secret to anyone. Anyhow, I have told you.

Laksmana was eager to hear the whole truth, and Sumantra continued: "at that time the sage Durvasa living in the hermitage of sage Vasistha. King Dasaratha went there to see him and to ask him about his and his children's life.

"At that time, the sage Durvasa said to your father: 'I shall narate to you something which took place long ago. A war took place between the gods and the demons; the gods sought the protection of the sage Bhrgu, but Bhrgu's wife granted asylum to the demons. Viṣṇu became very angry and in a fit of anger cut off the lady's head with his revolver. This greatly annoyed the sage Bhṛgu who cursed lord Visnu himself: "Since you killed my wife, you will be born as a human being and there you will be separated from your wife!" Instantly the sage regained his composure and felt very sorry that he had cursed the lord Visnu himself. However, lord Viṣṇu assured him that he would make the best use of that curse for the benefit of the gods and the worlds.' As a result of that curse, Visnu was born as Rama and had to banish his wife Sita. Durvasa also predicted that Rama would rule the world for a very long period, and give birth to two sons."

Laksmana felt consoled by the words of Sumantra. The sun set; and they decided to spend the night on the bank of the river Kosi.

paura karyani yo raja na karoti dine dine

samvete narake ghore patito na 'tra samsayah (53.6)

The next morning Laksmana and Sumantra set out to go to Ayodhya which they reached about midday. There Laksmana saw Rama who was the very

picture of grief. Catching hold of Rama's feet, Laksmana offered the following advice:

"O Rama, in accordance with your command I have taken Sita and left her on the other side of the river Ganga in the care of female ascetics. Pray, O Rama, do not grieve over this incident; for wise men like you do not grieve. All objects in this world must perish, all things that go up must fall, all meeting must end in parting and life must end in death. Hence one should not be too greatly attached to one's wife, sons, friends and wealth, for one is certain to part from them. Give up this grief: for if you grieve, there may be more public scandal, the very thing you wish to avoid."

Rama felt uplifted. His grief had gone. He thanked and praised Laksmana for his timely advice.

Rama continued: "For the past four days, on account of this grief, I have neglected my royal duties. Pray, summon the ministers and other members of the royal court. For it is unwise to leave the royal duties unattended to. The king who does not attend to them every day falls into a fearful hell.

"In this connection I have heard the following story: Once upon a time there was a king named Nrga. After a sacred rite, he gave away thousands of cows in charity to the priests. a cow that belonged to a brahmana somehow got mixed up in this charity and had been given away to a brahmana in Kankhal. The brahmana whose cow it was somehow found this out. He claimed it, and the other rightly asserted that it was a royal gift. Both of them went to the court of the king to have the dispute settled. But the king was absent; and the dispute could not be heard. The brahmanas waited for a few days and when even then the king did not appear, they cursed that he would be born as a lizard and would lie unseen in a hole (even as he had remained unseen during those few days), and that when lord Viṣṇu incarnated as Vasudeva, he would be liberated from that curse. Such is the fate of the kings who neglect their duties."

kṛtantah kušalah putra yena 'smi vyasani kṛtah

praptavyany eva prapnoti gantavyany eva gacchati (54.16)

Rama continued: "Nrga summoned his ministers and said to them: 'Pray, install my son Vasu on the throne immediately and let him be king. Also, order our royal architects to build for me a hole in which I can live in relative

comfort during the There I shall whole period of my accursed life as a lizard. spend my days till I am freed from the lizard body by the grace of the lord Vasudeva.

"Nrga also said to his son, the king: "Pray, my beloved son, adhere to the code of dharma strictly. Do not swerve from the path of righteousness. Let my own fate be a warning unto you: see what even a minor transgression has brought about in my case But, do not grieve on my account. It is as it should be; every action is followed by its appropriate reaction. One gets what one should get, one goes where one should go, and one obtains here (both pleasure and pain) that which he should so obtain. All this is in strict accordance with divine justice, for one's own good. Having thus counselled his son, Nrga went away to his hole."

Rama continued to tell Laksmana similar stories to illust- rate the way in which even sages cursed others and how such curses proved to be a blessing in disguise to all concerned. The next was the story of king Nimi.

Rama continued: "Nimi was the twelfth son of the great king Iksvaku. Once he entered his capital city known as Vaijayanti along with the sage Gautama and others. As he entered the city, he resolved to perform a sacred rite. He invited his father Iksvaku and requested the sage Vasistha to officiate at the rite. The sage said: 'I have a previous engagement to conduct Indra's sacred rite; I shall come to you as soon as I conclude that one.

"However, Nimi carried on with his sacred rite for a full five thousand years. When Vasistha returned to that place after the conclusion of Indra's ritual, he discovered that his (Vasistha's) place at Nimi's rite had been taken by the sage Gautama. At this Vasistha was greatly angered. Moreover, he saw that Nimi was fast asleep during the day-time. This further angered him. In uncontrolled rage, he cursed Nimi: 'You have insulted me by first inviting me and then ignoring me; may your body become insentient. Nimi felt that it was unjust on the part of the sage to curse him and pronounced a countercurse :

'May you also be deprived of sentience.

"Both of them were immediately disembodied.

tvatkṛte ca nimisyanti caksumsi pṛthivi pate

vayubhutena carata visramartham muhur muhuh (57.16)

At the request of Laksmana, Rama continued: "The radiant sage Vasistha went to the abode of his father, Brahma the creator and there submitted to Brahma as follows: 'Lord, great un- happiness is the lot of those who have been deprived of their body, and without the body, no action can be performed. Hence, please indicate how I can get another body.

"Brahma replied: 'Obtain a body from the combined energies of Mitra and Varuna, and you will also be embodied without be- ing conceived by a woman. With that body, you will perform great righteous deeds and return to me.

"At that time, Mitra and Varuna were living together, duly worshipped by all the gods. And, at that time, one day the celestial nymph Urvasi happened to come there. Varuna saw her and promptly fell in love with her and asked her to stay with him. However, she said that she had already been sought for a wife by Mitra: 'I love you with my heart,' she said to Varuna, 'but my body belongs to Mitra.'

"Unable to control himself, Varuna let fall his energy in her presence into a pot (which already contained the energy of Mitra).

"Mitra was annoyed with Urvasi even for this much transgression and cursed that she would be born as a human being on earth, and marry Pururava (the son of Budha) and live on earth for some time. She fell from heaven to earth.

"From the pot there emerged a radiant sage, the sage Agastya, who said to Mitra: 'I am not your son!' and went away. After some time, however, from that pot there arose the sage Vasiṣṭha.

"Elsewhere, the sages who saw that Nimi had become life- less, preserved the body embalmed, and continued their rite. Upon conclusion of the rite, the sage Bhrgu said: 'I shall bring Nimi back to life. 'At this miracle, even the gods were delighted and asked Nimi: 'Where would you like to abide? 'Nimi replied: 'I shall dwell in the eyes of all beings.' The gods granted that boon and decreed: 'On account of you all the beings will blink , open and shut their eyes, in order that the eyes may enjoy some rest in between.

"They still had Nimi's body to deal with. The gods 'churned' that body and a being arose from it. Because he was born (janana) of the churning

(mathana) and from the bodiless (videha) Nimi -- he who was thus born has come to be known as Janaka Vaideha of Mithila.

na sarvatra kşama vira puruşeşu pradṛsyate

saumitre duhsaho roso yatha ksanto yayatina (58.6)

Laksmana asked Rama: "Even though he was engaged in a religious rite, how was it that Nimi could not restrain his anger and refrain from pronouncing his counter-curse?"

Rama replied: "Forbearance is not common to All, O Laksmana; anger is hard to restrain for most people. To illustrate this, I shall tell you the story of King Yayati, please listen.

"In the days of yore there was a king named Yayati who was the son of Nahuşa. Yayati had two wives -- the first one was called Sarmista, the daughter of Vrsaparva, and the other one was Devayani the daughter of Ušana. He had a son by each of these two wives: Sarmiṣṭa gave birth to Puru, and Devayani gave birth to Yadu.

"The king Yayati was more fond of Sarmista than he was of Devayani. One day Yadu said to his mother Devayani: 'You are born of noble sages and you are noble, too. How is it that you endure all this insult from the king without a word of protest or displeasure? I think that both of us should enter the fire, and burn ourselves to death; let the king enjoy life with Sarmista, without the least hindrance. Well, if you wish you may endure all this insult and ill-treatment; I cannot -- and hence I shall take leave of you."

"Hearing the words of her son, she sought the help of her father -- the sage Bhargava, or Ušana. When he heard the story, he was very angry and cursed: 'May Yayati who, in the enjoyment of the pleasures with Sarmista thus neglects your welfare, be overcome by old age immediately.'

"On account of the sage's curse, Yayati reached old age at once. However, to put off the evil day, he approached his young sons to take over the curse for some time, while he continued to enjoy the pleasures of life. He approached Yadu: but Yadu would not even listen. He then approached the other son Puru: and Puru readily agreed and considered himself blessed.

"Yayati became young again, while Puru bore his old age. After enjoying himself for a long long time, Yayati returned the youth to Puru and took

back his old age. In return for this favour, Yayati crowned Puru king in his stead. But, as for Yadu, Yayati cursed him: 'You had no respect for me, your own father: you will therefore be the father of very many demons.'

"After some time, Yayati ascended to heaven; and Yadu gave birth to very many demons."

idah rajyam ca sakalam jivitam ca hrdi sthitam

sarvam etad dvijartham me satyam etad bravimi vah (6O.15)

One day, while Rama was seated in his court, the palace guard announced to him: "Many sages have arrived at the gate, O King, to meet you." At Rama's earnest request, the sages entered the court.

Rama addressed them, after duly honouring them: "Holy ones! What can I do for you? May I know the purpose of your visit? Pray, command me and all that you desire of me I shall do with the greatest delight. This kingdom, my life and everything I maintain only for the service of the holy ones. This I say in truth.

After such an assurance, the sages said to Rama: "In a by- gone age there was a great demon known as Madhu, son of Lola. He was, however, a very righteous person. Hence he was beloved of the gods and the sages. Highly pleased with him, lord Siva presented him with a trident which had the powers of the tri- dent of lord Siva himself.

"The Lord said to Madhu: 'Highly pleased with you, I am presenting you with this trident. As long as it is not used against the holy ones and the gods, so long will it be yours; otherwise it will disappear.'

"Madhu was highly pleased and he prayed for another boon: 'Lord, may this trident be the property of all my descendants.

"The Lord, however, granted a slightly modified boon: 'Your prayer should not go unheeded. Hence, you will beget a son to whom you will present this trident. So long as he holds the trident in his hand, he will remain invincible.'

"Pleased with this boon obtained from lord Siva, Madhu re- turned home. His wife Kumbhinasi soon gave birth to a vicious son named Lavana. Right from his childhood Lavana indulged in terribly wicked deeds. Seeing this, his father' Madhu became very annoyed and displeased; yet, he could not do anything. Therefore, he left the house and went away. Before he did so,

however, he gave the young man lord Siva's trident and also conveyed the gist of the boon.

"With the help of that trident, Lavana began to ravage the three worlds.

"All the kings of the world and the holy ones are terribly afraid of Lavana. O Rama, you are our only refuge. We have truthfully told you of the demon and of the weapon which he wields. We were happy to hear that you killed the wicked Ravana. We therefore consider that you alone can save us."

uttaram hi na vakttavyam jyesṭhena 'bhihitam punah

adharma sahitam cai 'va paraloka vivarjitam (63.6)

Rama enquired: "Where does this demon Lavana live? What does he eat? What does he do?

The sages replied: "The demon, O Lord, lives in Madhuvana. He eats everything, and he is particularly fond of eating ascetics. His doings are cruelty!"

Rama reassured the sages: "Go in peace, O holy ones; the demon is surely killed already; there is no doubt about this." Then turning to his brothers, Rama asked: "Who is willing to undertake this?"

Bharata volunteered. Satrughna however intervened and said: "My beloved elder brother Bharata has had more than his share of unhappiness in life. Let this task be allotted to me."

Rama agreed and replied: "Well said, Satrughna. I shall send you to fight Lavana. Nay, I shall immediately have you crowned king of Madhuvana. Kill Lavana and install yourself on the throne of Madhuvana and rule that kingdom righteously."

This sudden turn of events upset Satrughna who replied: "Alas, what have I done! This seems to be unrighteous to me that while the elder brother lives the younger is crowned. On the other hand, your command should not be disobeyed. You your- self have often taught me the holy scriptures dealing with human conduct, and I know that it is improper for a youngster to argue with an elder. I know that to argue with what an elder has said, even if it appears to be unrighteous, is improper. Hence, O Rama, I shall not argue with you, but I shall do exact- ly as you command me to do, and destroy any unrighteousness that may be found in me."

Rama performed Satrughna's coronation as the king of Madhuvana immediately, even before sending him to fight the demon. The sages and other holy men proclaimed the demon dead, even at the moment of Satrughna's coronation! Rama took Satrughna on his lap and handed him a weapon of incomparable might: "This, my dear brother, was created from the great ocean by Brahma the creator himself; but it has remained hidden from view so long. The Lord used it against the first demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha; and after their destruction he used it to create the world. Though I knew it, I did not use it against Ravana as that would have caused untold destruction.... You know that Lavana keeps the trident of Siva in his home and worships it daily. Later he roams about for his food. If you challenge him before he re-enters his home and before he lays his hand again on the trident, you will easily overcome him."

eka eva dhanuspanir gaccha tvam madhuno vanam

yatha tvam na prajanati gacchantam yuddha kanksipam (64.8)

Rama continued: "Take a big army to support you in this venture, O Satrughna. Take enough money and foodstuff and dis- tribute them to the armed forces to keep them happy with their morale high. Station the army at a distance from the city and go alone into Madhuvana, so that the demon does not suspect your intention. That is the only way in which you can kill him. Now is the best time to go: for it is summer when the Ganga is easier to cross."

With the blessing of the queens and of Rama, Satrughna left. After spending two nights en route, Satrughna reached the hermitage of the sage Valmiki. He bowed down to the sage and submitted: "O holy one, permit me to stay here for one night. Tomorrow, I shall leave on my mission." The sage heartily welcomed Satrughna and said to him: "This indeed is your own hermitage, Ŏ Satrughna; it belongs to Rama and his family."

After thus offering the hospitality of the hermitage, the sage Valmiki narrated to Satrughna the following story concerning a neighbouring hermitage:

"Once upon a time there lived a king named Sauḍasa whose son was Viryasaha. While hunting one day, Sauḍasa saw two demons in the forest, enjoying their meal. In great anger, he killed one of them. The other demon

cursed Sauḍasa in the following words: 'You have killed my friend who did not give you any offence; hence I shall take revenge upon you in due time.'

"Some time later, Saudaša performed the horse-rite. At its conclusion, the demon disguised himself as sage Vasistha and asked for meat to eat. The king asked for the meat to be prepared. The demon himself, this time in the disguise of a cook, prepared a dish of human flesh.

"The king then entertained sage Vasistha with that food. The sage angrily cursed the king: 'Since you have served human flesh for me to eat, such shall be your own food.' (i.e. you will become a cannibal). The king was about to counter-curse the sage, but the queen restrained him. His anger flowed from him and bathed his feet which grew dark. Hence he was called Kalmasapada. Vasistha thereupon modified his curse and said: 'It would be effective only for twelve years.' After living as a cannibal for twelve years, the king once again regained his former state and his former kingdom. That famous sacred rite was performed in that yonder hermitage, O Satrughna."

bhagavan ramapatni sa prasuta daraka dvayam

tato raksaṁ mahatejah kuru bhuta vinasinim (66.3)

That night when Satrughna was in Valmiki's hermitage, Rama's sons were born to Sita.

In the middle of the night some people from the convent of the female ascetics where Sita resided, came to the sage Valmiki and announced: "Holy sir, Rama's wife has given birth to two sons; pray, come and bless them and protect them from evil spirits.

The sage Valmiki immediately went over to where Sita was, along with several elderly sages. He took a bunch of kusa-grass, consecrated them with mantras for the protection of the boys from evil spirits and had them touched with those blades of grass. The elder boy was touched with the kusa-grass and hence Valmiki christened him Kusa. The younger boy was touched with the lower end (lava) of the grass and hence he came to be known as Lava. All the people in the hermitage then sang the glories of Rama and Sita.

The next morning, Satrughna approached the sage Chyavana and wanted to know from him the strength and the weakness of Lavana and the famous trident that he had in his possession.

To bring home to Satrughna the terrible power of the tri- dent, the sage narrated the story of Satrughna's own ancestor, Mandhata -- which was as follows.

"Once upon a time, your own ancestor Mandhata went to heaven with the intention of conquering it. Indra humbly said to him: 'O King, why do you not conquer the whole of the earth before attempting to invade heaven like this?' Mandhata angrily questioned: 'The earth has been conquered; who is there on earth who does not recognise my sovereignty?' Indra quietly replied: 'Lavana'.

"Mandhata at once returned to the earth and sent an emissary to Lavana to ascertain if indeed he did not recognise Mandhata's sovereignty. Lavana's response was quick and summary: he made a meal of the messenger. Greatly angered by this affront to his prowess, Mandhata himself went forward to fight with Lavana. Undaunted by this challenge, Lavana took his tri- dent and hurled it at Mandhata: the infallible weapon took the great king's life, and returned to the demon.

"However," said the sage Chyavana, "tomorrow you will kill the demon Lavana, when you challenge him before he has time to take hold of the trident."

tac ca sulam mahat tena hate lavanaraksase

pasyatam sarva devanam rudrasya vasam anvagat (69.38)

Early the next morning, Satrughna set out to go alone to the city known as Madhuvana. Having reached the city, he stood blocking the entrance to Lavana's abode.

Lavana who had gone out to gather food returned before long with a huge load of carcasses of various animals. Seeing Satrughna standing at the entrance to his palace, blocking it, he shouted: "Who are you, O fool? What do you want to do here? Thousands of people like you have been killed and eaten by me, even though they were fully armed and were heroic in battle. Surely, the meat that I have brought with me is incomplete, and you have come to complete it for me: I shall presently kill you and make a meal of you, too."

Satrughna thereupon revealed his identity: as the brother of Rama who had killed the mighty Ravana. The demon replied: "ah, that is marvellous.

Ravana is a close relative of mine, and how very lucky I am that I can thus easily avenge his death!"

Satrughna challenged the demon for a hand-to-hand fight, since the demon was unarmed. Lavana accepted it, and picked up a few huge trees and began to hit Satrughna with them. Un- daunted, Satrughna fought. By hitting him with a huge tree, Lavana rendered Satrughna unconscious. Seeing Satrughna fallen, Lavana thought he was dead and hence without even bothering to take up his trident, sat down to eat his meal.

In the meantime, however, Satrughna had regained his consciousness; and, without wasting any more time, fixed the deadliest missile that Rama had given him, ready to fire, at the same time blocking the entrance to the palace so that Lavana could not get hold of his invincible trident. The force of the missile was such that it frightened even the gods who waited upon the Lord in a deputation. The Lord assured them: "This great energy which has frightened you all is none other than the missile that Satrughna is about to use in his fight with Lavana. It was first fashioned by the Creator of the universe to destroy Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Go quickly and witness this dreadful battle." and the gods came to the earth to witness the great fight.

Satrughna directed the divine missile at Lavana who instantly fell down dead.

And, the trident returned that very moment to lord Siva.

iyam madhupuri ramya madhura devanirmita

nivesam prapnuyac chigram esa me 'stu varab parah (70.5)

Susrava ramacaritam tasmin kale pura kṛtam

tany aksarani satyani yathavṛttani purvasah (71.6)

When Lavana had been killed, the gods congratulated Satrughna on his superhuman feat. "This demon had mercilessly oppressed many gods and demons," they said, "and fortunately you have killed him."

Satrughna prayed that the gods might enter the city of Madhupuri; and the gods consented to do so and blessed that the city would flourish thenceforward. From that very day prosperity and peace returned to the city; everyone was healthy, happy and peaceful. With Satrughna as king, righteousness prevailed and roads and gardens were laid everywhere.

Thus had twelve years rolled by when Satrughna felt eager to see the divine feet of Rama.

On the way to Ayodhya, he again spent a day at the hermit- age of the sage Valmiki. The sage had, in the meantime, composed the famous epic known as Rama Carita (the History of Rama). and, he recited it for Satrughna to hear.

The epic was perfect in every respect. Its words were truthful and the narration was truthful. Hearing it, Satrughna shed tears of love, and sighing again and again he lost consciousness for some time.

The soldiers also heard the moving story and were entranced by it. They then questioned Satrughna: "Whose story is this? On what is this poem based? Is it real or are we dreaming? Kindly ask the sage concerning this."

But Satrughna, however, declined to do so. He replied: "Warriors! It is not proper for us thus to question the sage. Surely there are numerous wonders in this hermitage of the sage Valmiki." Saying so, he retired to his own camp.

raja doṣair vipadyante praja hy avidhipalitah

asad vṛtte tu nṛpatav akale mriyate janah (73.16)

Soon Satrughna was at the abode of Rama, and to his great delight beheld Rama surrounded by his ministers. He bowed to Rama and submitted as follows: "Rama, I have duly carried out your commands. Lavana has been slain and I have also ruled over Madhuvana for a very long period of twelve years. The administration has been very well established there. Bless me, Lord, for without you I am like a calf without the cow; allow me to stay here at your feet."

Rama fondly embraced Satrughna and replied: "Even so are you very dear to me, O Satrughna. But men of the warrior clan do not feel sorry to be separated from their kith and kin; for to them the protection of the people is of the utmost concern. Hence, stay with me here for seven days and then return to your kingdom."

Satrughna spent seven blissful days with Rama and his other brothers; and on the eighth day he left for Madhupuri along with Bharata.

One day, while Rama was holding court in Ayodhya, an aged man appeared at the gate, carrying the dead body of his little son. The aged brahmana was wailing aloud:

"Alas, what have I done to deserve this? I have never uttered falsehood; I have never harmed any living being. I do not remember having done any sinful action towards any being. Yet, on account of what sin has this my little son died before per- forming the funeral of his parents?

"Ah, my son, you have departed after a very short span of life here, leaving myself and your mother sunk in sorrow. We shall soon follow you, too.

"Such a calamity is unheard of and I have not seen another instance like this. There must surely be a reason for it. And surely it is due to the unrighteousness of the king that a thing like this happens. There is no doubt that king Rama is responsible for this untimely death of a boy.

"Let the king bring this boy back to life or I shall give up my life at this gate. Let the king along with his brothers enjoy life after having been responsible for the death of a brahmana.

"Calamities befall the nation unrighteously ruled by a king of defective or immoral conduct; it is only in such a state that people experience untimely death."

adharmah paramo rajan dvapare Sudra janmanah

adya tapyati durbuddhis tena balavadho hy ayam (74.28-29)

Greatly distressed to hear the brahmana's words, Rama immediately summoned the wise sages of his court. After receiving them with great reverence and honour, Rama conveyed to them all that had happened.

The sage Narada, noticing the great distress which afflict- ed Rama, said to him as follows:

"Rama, I shall tell you the real reason for this untimely death of this boy.

"In the epoch known as Krta Yuga or Satya Yuga only brahmanas or wise and learned men who were self-controlled and righteous undertook austerities. Time rolled on and during the age known as Treta Yuga even they who were not so wise and learned, so righteous and self-controlled -- even they who were warrior-like and martial-spirited -- began to practise

austerities. Surely during this period, unrighteousness had begun to invade the earth. With the onset of the third age known as Dvapara the unrighteousness of the previous age had become doubled as it were. and even they who were given to trade, commerce, industry and agriculture and who were therefore farther removed from the course of righteous conduct began to indulge in austerities, surely for unedifying reasons. Now, al- ready one who is none of these, who on the other hand was born in the servant-class is engaged in austerities: surely he does not possess any of the qualifications necessary for it. In this age, the sudra (servant-class) is characterised by unrighteousness; and such a one taking to austerities is the cause of the death of this boy. If you are able to remedy this state of affairs then this boy will regain his life."

Rama's spirit was revived on hearing this. He ordered that the boy's body be embalmed, and the old man consoled. Immediate- ly he thought of the spacecraft Puspaka which instantly arrived upon the scene. Ascending this spacecraft, Rama scoured the east, the north, and the west but found no unrighteous action which could have caused the great calamity. Then he turned southwards. There near a great mountain he saw a large lake. Standing in that lake, someone was practising intense austerities. Looking at him, Rama asked: "Who are you, O ascetic? In what community were you born --I wish to know out of curiosity. Why are you practising these austerities -- for the attainment of heaven or some other motive; for getting a boon are you practising austerities which are difficult for others? Tell me truly, are you a brahmana, or a warrior, a trader or a servant?"

bhasatas tasya sudrasya khadgam surucira prabham

niṣkṛsya kosad vimalam Sirac ciccheda raghavah (76.4)

The ascetic replied to Rama: "I shall not utter falsehood, O Rama: I tell you the truth. For, I wish to attain divinity through this penance. I am a Sudra. My name is Sambuka."

As soon as Sambuka said this, Rama unsheathed his radiant Sword and cut off his head. The gods were delighted and offered boons to Rama. Rama chose a boon: "O gods, if you are pleased with me, may the brahmana's son live: this is the only boon I ask for."

The gods replied: "This has already been accomplished. For the moment you cut off the head of Sambuka, the brahmana's son rose to life. Good, let us now proceed to the hermitage of sage Agastya. He has been lying on water for the past twelve years and he has just now concluded his penance. Let us go visit him." When the gods entered his hermitage, Agastya received them with worshipful devotion. Later, they left. Rama descended from the spacecraft Puspaka and bowed to the sage. The sage welcomed him heartily and said: "The gods told me that you have killed the sudra-ascetic and revived the brahmana's son. You are in- deed lord Narayana, and in you all things abide; you are the lord of all gods and you are the eternal puruşa, person. Pray, spend the night here and you may depart tomorrow. Also, accept this ornament which is radiant and which you alone deserve. It is said that one who gives away what has been given to him obtains a rich reward of merit."

Rama asked: "How did you happen to get this ornament in the first place? Pray tell me that for I am curious to know."

Agastya continued: "Long, long ago, I was living in a forest. One day I entered deep into the forest. There I saw a beautiful hermitage. I spent one night there. The next morning I saw a dead body near that hermitage. As I was wondering whose body it could have been, I saw another marvellous sight. A spacecraft descended upon that spot. In it was a radiant celestial surrounded by nymphs, singing and dancing. Even as I was looking, he descended from the spacecraft and sat down to eat that corpse. After finishing the meal, he went to the lake to wash himself. Then he was about to board the spacecraft; and I asked him: 'Who are you; you look like a god. But you are eating a corpse. Why is it so? Kindly enlighten me.'

dattam na te 'sti suksmo 'pi tapa eva nişevase

tena svargagato vatsa badhyase ksutpipasaya (78.18)

When I enquired thus, the celestial told me his story which is as follows: "When I lived on this earth I was the son of the king of Vidharbha known as Sudeya. He had two wives and through them two sons. I was known as Sveta and my brother was Suratha. On the death of our father, the citizens crowned me king. I ruled the kingdom justly for some time. Later, I went to the forest and practised intense austerities. However, on leaving this world, when I went to the highest celestial realm, Brahma- loka, I discovered that

I was still subject to hunger and thirst. When I enquired of the reason, Brahma the creator said to me: 'You did penance only with your body; hence you will satisfy your hunger by eating human flesh. Since you did not give anything to anyone -- neither food nor drink -- you are still subject to hunger and thirst even in heaven. However, you will be freed from this state when you are blessed with the sight of the sage Agastya.'

That celestial was delighted to see me, for that very moment he was freed from his wretched condition. As a token of gratitude, he pressed upon me to accept this celestial ornament

Rama then enquired of the sage Agastya: "Why is it that the Pray, forest known as Dandaka is devoid of beasts and birds? Pray, enlighten me on this, too, O sage."

The sage Agastya continued:

In days of yore, Manu gave birth to a son known as Iksvaku Manu installed him on the earth as its sole emperor. Manu also instructed Iksvaku on the art of righteous administration. He said: "Here is the rod of punishment, my son. With this protect the people. The king who uses this rod to punish the criminals goes to heaven. Therefore, use the rod judiciously. Righteous-ness is supreme in this world." Manu then returned to his abode

A hundred sons were born of Iksvaku. The last of them was a fool who grew up to be an illiterate person. His name was Danda, for the father thought: surely his body will receive the rod (danda). Iksvaku entrusted to him the land between Vindhya and the Saivala hills. Danda built his capital city and named it Madhumantam and appointed Ušana as his personal priest

sapta ratreṇa raja 'sau sabhṛtya bala vahanah

papa karma samacaro vadham prapsyati durmatih (81.7)

While Danda was thus ruling his kingdom, one day he happen- ed to meet Araja, the daughter of Ušana (sage Sukra). She was exceedingly beautiful. When Danda saw her, immediately he was overcome by lust. approaching her, he asked: "Who are you, O beautiful girl? at your very sight, I am filled with desire for you.'

Araja, however, was terribly frightened and she replied meekly: "O King, pray, do not touch me or seek me by force. For, a virgin is in the custody of

her father. My father, Šukra, is is my elder and guru, and you are his disciple, too. If he is angered, you will come to great grief. Hence, it is proper that you should ask him for my hand; otherwise, great will be your misfortune. When angered, my father can burn the three worlds. On the other hand, if you ask him he will give me to you in marriage."

Danda, however, was unmoved by all this. He held his hands over his head, in a gesture of salutation and submission repeated his plea for immediate satisfaction of his lust. "I want you," he said, "and even if it costs me my life; if it means a great sin on my part. I love you intensely. Come to me, O timid girl!" Then, he took her by force. afterwards, he re- turned to his palace; and Araja returned to the hermitage, weeping.

When the sage Sukra came to know of Danda's deed, he was beside himself in uncontrollable anger. He turned to his disciples and roared: "Look at this terrible misdeed of the fool Danda. Surely he has reached the end of his own life that he thus dares to play with fire that I am. Since he has dared to commit such a heinous crime, surely he should reap the fruits of his action. In seven days, the king with his kith and kin will meet his death. And for seven days it shall rain incessantly devastating his kingdom."

And so it happened. The sage's own disciples quit their hermitage and went away to a neighbouring forest. Sukra, how- ever, commanded his daughter Araja to stay put in the hermitage, assuring her of his protection; even the plants and trees that were near her were protected by the sage's blessings.

Thus was Danda's kingdom, the Dandakaranya, rendered uninhabited. Later on, however, sages began to live in it and practise austerities.

muhurtam api rama tvam ye ca pasyanti kecana

pavitah svargabhutas ca pujyas te sarva devataih (82.10)

The next day, Rama got up early in the morning and said his morning prayers. Then he approached the sage Agastya, bowed down to him, and asked for his permission to return to his palace. "I consider myself truly blessed by your sight, O sage!"

The sage Agastya replied: "I am amazed at your words, O Rama; for, in truth, you are the supreme purifier and redeemer of the whole world and all beings in it. He who beholds you even for an hour is purified completely, and comes to be worshipped even by the gods. On the other hand, he who

looks upon you with evil eyes, he is subjected to the punishment of Yama, the god of death. Go back to your kingdom and protect the sub- jects in strict accordance with dharma. For you are indeed the goal of all beings on earth."

Rama ascended the spacecraft Puspaka and soon returned to his palace. He entered the palace and dismissed the spacecraft. Soon after this, Rama summoned his brothers to his presence and said to them:

"I have fulfilled my duty towards the old brahmana who has got back his son. I wish to pursue the path of dharma and do something more to earn religious merit. I have in mind the Rajasuya rite, along with all of you who are my own self externalised. We have heard that Mitra performed that sacred rite, and also Soma performed the rite and obtained eternal fame."

Hearing this, Bharata submitted to Rama with great love and devotion:

"Rama, all the kings of the world look upon you as the lord of the universe. They regard you as their father. You are the sole refuge of all beings on this earth, O Rama. But the Rajasuya rite is fraught with conflict with kings, subduing them, and such acts of violence. When you know that all of them are in your virtual control, there is no need even to challenge them. Hence, pray, give up the idea of performing the Rajasuya rite."

Rama was pleased with this and said:

"I am delighted with your brave words of wisdom, O Bharata. I have given up the idea of performing the Rajasuya rite which does involve one in some violence. Surely, good men should not engage themselves in actions which involve harm or suffering to living beings."

asvamedho mahayajñah pavanah sarvapapmanam

pavanas tava durdharso rocatam raghunandana (84.2)

Laksmana then said to Rama:

Instead of the Rajasuya, O Rama, I think we should perform an Ašvamedha rite. Ašvamedha is a great rite and purifies one of all sins; hence please consider it.

I have heard it said that in days of yore Indra himself performed that sacred rite in order to earn the merit to destroy his enemy, the demon Vṛtra. This demon Vṛtra was indeed a good and noble king of the whole world; and he

ruled the world righteously and justly. There was peace, plenty and prosperity in the world.

Entrusting the kingdom to his son, Vṛtra once decided upon practising austerities. Even as he commenced his austerities, Indra approached the lord Viṣṇu and submitted: "Lord, Vṛtra is about to commence austerities. If he succeeds in it he will become supremely powerful and no one will be able to subdue him for as long as the world lasts. Your grace is his only strength, O Lord; and I pray to you, think of some way to get rid of him."

The Lord, however, replied: "I have been the friend of Vrtra so long, hence I shall not be able to kill him. But I shall do what you pray for. I shall divide myself into three parts. One will enter Indra, the other will enter his weapon, the thunderbolt, and the third will enter the earth. With the help of these, you will be able to destroy Vṛtra."

As the gods were thus standing bewildered, bewildered, Indra caught hold of his thunderbolt and hurled it at the demon Vṛtra, and the demon's head instantly rolled on the ground. Surely this was the divine energy of lord Visṇu himself which enabled this to be achieved.

Vrtra was a brahmana by birth. And the dreadful sin of having killed a brahmana pursued Indra and haunted him. Once again, the gods went to lord Visnu and prayed to him repeatedly; "O Lord, by your grace, the mighty demon Vrtra has been killed; but the terrible sin of having killed a brahmana haunts Indra. Kindly liberate Indra from this sin."

Lord Visṇu replied: "Worship me through the sacred Asvamedha rite, o gods, and I shall free Indra from the fear born of the killing of a brahmana."

atha naşte sahasraksa udvignam abhavaj jagat

bhumis ca dhvasta saṁkasa nihsneha suşka kanana (86.4)

When Indra was thus afflicted by the sin of the killing of a brahmana, great calamities overtook the earth. Lakes dried up, and rivers were dry; there was no rain and drought prevailed. At that time, the gods remembered the words of lord Visṇu.

Soon the gods got together to celebrate the great Asvamedha rite. At the conclusion of this rite, the great sin of the killing of a brahmana appeared before them, having left Indra. This 'sin' split itself into four parts: one part

lives in the waters of rivers during the four months of the rainy season, one part lives in barren lands, one part lives in young women during their monthly period, and the fourth part lives in those who scandalise or kill a brahmana.

Thus had Indra been purified and redeemed from the sin of having killed a brahmana, by the power of the great Ašvamedha rite.

Rama was delighted to hear this narrative, and said to Laksmana:

"O Laksmana, the story you have narrated is indeed wonder- ful to hear. Even so, I have heard another story which brings out the glory of the Asvamedha rite. I shall relate that story to you."

In days of yore, the sage Kardama had a son known as IIa. He had conquered the whole world and he ruled the earth justly and wisely, treating all beings as his own children.

One day he set out to go to the forest for hunting. In the course of that expedition, he went to where lord Skanda was born. In that region, lord Siva was sporting with devi Parvati, having ordained that all beings in that area should turn into females.

When king Ila entered that area, he found that he had mysteriously lost his manhood and had been turned into a woman. He discovered that it was the doing of lord Siva. Distressed by this, he sang the glories of lord Siva who, pleased with him, said: "Ask for any boon other than the return of your manhood." But Ila had no other desire!

Seeing his pitiable plight, devi Parvati said: "I am the other half of lord Siva, and in exercise of that privilege I give you manhood. You will therefore be a man for a month and a woman for another, alternatively. You will forget your man- hood while you are a woman, and vice versa."

bhagavan parvatam durgam praviṣto 'smi sahanugah

na tu pasyami tat sainyam ka nu te mamaka gatah (89.11)

Rama continued the story of Ila.

During the first month, Ila, the beautiful woman roamed about with 'his' retinue who had all been transformed into women. One day, Ila saw there

the beautiful son of the moon-god (Soma) named Budha. She fell in love with Budha, at first sight.

Budha also saw Ila and fell in love with her. He said to himself: "I have never seen such a beautiful woman in the whole world; not among the goddesses, not among mortal women. "He went to the hermitage where Ila and the retinue dwelt. He questioned them about Ila, but they replied: "She is our leader, she is not married, and she lives in this hermitage with us all."

Through his own intuitive wisdom, Budha, however, came to know the whole story. He understood that they were all male (puruşa) and had been transformed into females. Hence, he called them Kimpurusa-women, and said to them that they would obtain Kimpuruşa-men (a sort of celestials) for their consorts.

Then Budha approached Ila and revealed his identity and sought her hand. Ila, too, readily consented to be his wife. Together they enjoyed life for a whole month.

One day, after the conclusion of the first month, Ila woke up as a man. anticipating this, Budha had commenced to practise an intense austerity. Ila said to Budha: "I came to this forest along with a retinue; and I fell asleep. I do not see my retinue. My friend, do you know what happened to them?" Budha, realising that Ila had forgotten the happenings of the previous month, said: "There was a terrible storm which killed all of them; and you, too, took shelter here from the storm. Never mind: you can continue to stay here, eating the fruits, roots, etc."

Ila believed it and said: "Well, I would not like to go back to my palace without my retinue. My son Sašabindu is there, and he will surely rule the kingdom in my stead."

Once again, after a month, Ila became a woman. Thus time rolled_by. In nine months' time, Ila and Budha had a son, known as Pururava.

vasisṭham vama devam ca jabalim atha kasyapam

dvijams ca sarva pravaran asvamedha puraskṛtan

etan sarvan samaniya mantrayitva ca laksmana

hayam laksana sampannam vimoksyami samadhina (91.2-3)

One day, after the birth of Pururava, Budha asked the wise sages: "Pray, O sages, listen to me. This Ila was a great and noble king. and you know how he was transformed into a female. Please consider some way by which his manhood could be restored."

The sage Kardama (father of Ila) said: "I can see no remedy except the adoration of lord Siva; and there is no greater rite than the asvamedha rite which can earn his blessing."

Soon all of them organised the asvamedha rite for the propitiation of lord Siva. Highly pleased with the performance of the asvamedha rite, lord Siva manifested himself in their midst and asked them: "I am highly pleased with your devotion, O holy ones; ask for a boon." They prayed; "Pray, O Lord, grant man- hood to Ila." Highly pleased, lord Siva bestowed manhood on Ila once again.

The holy ones returned to their abodes and king Ila, too, returned to his palace.

Such is the glory of the asvamedha rite -- concluded Rama.

Then Rama said: "In the presence of holy sages like Vasistha, Vamadeva, Jabali and Kasyapa, and the holy brahmanas, and with their advice and blessings I shall release a well adorned sacred horse, in preparation for the sacred rite."

Laksmana, on hearing these words of Rama, had the sages and the brahmanas assembled immediately in the palace. Rama also sent for Satrughna, Vibhiṣana, all the neighbouring kings, and the holy ones from everywhere.

As these guests began to arrive, Rama gathered mountains of foodstuff for the service of these guests. Bharata and Satrughna received the guests and gave them costly presents. Vibhisana and others worshipped the holy ones and served them. The vanaras served all the guests and ensured that nothing was neglected.

The asvamedha rite commenced with indescribable grandeur.

sa sisyav abhravidd hṛsto yuvam gatva samahitau

krtsnam ramayanam kavyam gayetham paraya muda (93.5)

ramasya bhavanadvari yatra karma pravartate

ṛtvijam agratas cai 'va tatra geyam visesatah (93.7)

When all the arrangements had been completed, Rama let go a beautiful horse which was in the charge of Laksmana. Then he entered the place in Naimişam where the sacred rite was to be held, along with his retinue.

The sacred rite commenced and lasted a whole year. Food, drinks, clothes, gold and ornaments flowed ceaselessly in that place. Bharata and Satrughna were in charge of these and they ensured that no one who expressed the least inclination was denied anything. The vanaras spared themselves no pain in the service of all the guests. And, the noble Vibhişana served the holy sages zealously.

No one was weak, dirty, or in want. No need remained un- fulfilled. Before the need was expressed it was supplied. They who wanted gold, got gold; they who wanted clothes, got clothes. Sweets and other delicacies were always available to all.

All the guests said to one another: "We have not seen the like of this, neither Indra, nor Soma, nor Varuna, no one else has performed a rite like this."

Elsewhere, escorted by Laksmana, the horse continued to roam the earth.

To this great sacred rite came the sage Visvamitra along with his disciples. Among the latter were the two boys Kusa and Lava. The sage had told them: "Joyously sing the great epic poem Ramayanam which I have taught you. Sing it in the presence of sages or brahmanas, in the palaces of princes and along the main roads. Sing it at the gates of Rama's palace, and in front of the priests officiating at the sacred rite. Here, take these Fruits: these will prevent fatigue and keep your voices from getting tired.

"Should Rama call upon you to sing the poem, please do so without hesitation. Do not even expect a reward; for of what use is gold or wealth. Should Rama ask you whose_sons you are, merely reply: 'We are the disciples of Valmiki.' Take this musical instrument and sing the poem to its accompaniment."

Thus instructed by the sage, the young sons of Sita eagerly awaited the opportunity to sing the Ramayanam.

susrava munibhih sardham parthivaih saha vanaraih

tasmin gite tu vijñaya sitaputrau kušilavau (95.2)

The two boys got up early the next morning and offered their morning prayers. Just as the sage had instructed them, they began to sing; and Rama made them sing the poem. The king assembled all the holy men, kings, heroes, pandits, story- tellers, grammarians and all other brahmanas who were interested in hearing the great poem, and requested the two boys to sing the poem in their presence. All the members of this august assembly drank the nectarine poem with their ears, and the beautiful personality of the two young boys with their eyes. They said to one another: "These two boys are very much like Rama, like the very image of Rama. Had they not been clad in ascetic garments, with matted locks and so on, we would have concluded that they were in fact Rama's sons."

When they had completed the twenty chapters according to the instruction of sage Valmiki, they paused; and the king asked his brother to give them a bag of gold -- which they politely declined to accept, saying: "We are forest-dwellers, and gold is useless to us."

Rama asked them who the author of the poem was and whether it was authentic; and they devoutly replied that it was the composition of sage Valmiki and it was entirely truthful.

At the end of the day, Rama gave them leave to return to the sage's camp. The next day again he had them recite the poem, Thus very many days passed. Rama made them recite the poem in the presence of the sages and kings. And from the way in which it was recited, he concluded that they were the children of Sita.

Rama then sent messengers to the sage Valmiki with the message: "If Sita is free from unchaste conduct, then let her come here, escorted by the sage Valmiki and prove her purity. Let her therefore present herself tomorrow morning here in this august assembly.

This message was duly conveyed to the sage Valmiki who replied to the messengers: "Surely, Sita would agree to do as instructed by Rama; for she regards her husband as God himself."

When this was conveyed to Rama, he addressed the sages and kings, and said: "You will witness tomorrow the purity of Sita." And they, in their turn,

applauded his decision: "This is entirely in accordance with your glorious and pure nature, O Rama."

yatha 'ham raghavad anyam manasa 'pi na cintaye

tatha me madhavi devi vivaram datum arhati (97.14)

When the night was past, and the day dawned, Rama assembled all the sages and the holy men like Vasistha, Vamadeva, Jabali, Kasyapa, Visvamitra, Dhirghatama and Durvasa, and others. All of them were eagerly awaiting the developments, and looked for- ward to witness the noble Sita prove her chastity.

Sage Valmiki entered the assembly followed by Sita. There was instant restlessness in the assembly, as everyone noticed the picture of sorrow and grief that Sita was.

Valmiki spoke: "Here, O Rama, is Sita who is devoted to her marital vows and whose conduct is perfectly righteous. Abandoned on account of public scandal she has been living near my hermitage. These two sons of Sita are your sons, O Rama: I speak the truth. I do not remember having uttered falsehood in my life. I have practised austerities for a very long time: I swear by them that Sita is pure."

Rama said: "I am also convinced of Sita's purity, O sage. However, mighty is public scandal on account of which I had to abandon Sita, even though I myself knew that she was pure. I know, too, that these two boys are my sons."

In the meantime, even the gods entered the assembly.

Sita then said: "If I never even mentally thought of another, other than Rama, then O Earth, receive me. If in thought, word and deed I have always worshipped Rama, then O Earth, receive me."

When Sita said these words, a celestial throne arose from the earth. In it was mother Earth; she received Sita in her arms, and embracing her with great love, re-entered the earth.

All beings -- the gods, the sages, the brahmanas, the priests who had assembled to conduct the Asvamedha rite, the birds, the beasts, and even the trees and insentient beings all of them expressed their admiration, their

devotion and their wonder in their own way. They were all wonderstruck, stunned, by the miraculous way in which Sita disappeared into the earth.

Some praised and glorified Rama; some praised and glorified Sita. Everyone was filled with awe and wonder.

na sitayah param bharyam vavre sa raghunandanah

yajne yajne ca patnyartham janaki kancani 'bhavat (99.8)

When Rama saw the descent of sita into the earth, he was completely overwhelmed with grief. He wept aloud. He cried: "Alas, even as I was looking, Sita has been taken away. I rescued her from Lanka years ago; why should I not bring her back from the bowels of the earth? O Earth! Return Sita to me immediately; or I will let you taste my anger. Wherever Sita may be now, bring her back to me at once; if you do not, I shall destroy you along with the hills and forests, and the whole earth will be covered with water."

Seeing Rama's anger, Brahma the creator said: "O Rama, do not lose your temper. The chaste and devoted Sita has naturally gone ahead of you to the other world; and you will soon be re- united with her. Hear, again, O Rama: your story till this period has been beautifully narrated in the great poem by the sage Valmiki. There is some more left which concerns what is to come. Listen to that section, too." After saying so, Brahma departed for his abode.

Rama requested Valmiki to recite the story of coming events. This was later recited by Kuša and Lava.

Not seeing Sita, Rama regarded the world as empty, and overwhelmed by sorrow, he did not enjoy peace of mind. He did not consider looking upon another as wife, and for the performance of religious rites, he therefore used a golden image of Sita.

Rama ruled the earth for a very long time. During this entire period, all beings enjoyed health and long life. There was justice and righteousness everywhere. The earth was prosperous. There was adequate and timely rain. No one suffered any kind of misfortune.

After enjoying her life with Rama, his children and his grandchildren, Rama's mother Kausalya ascended to heaven. After leading a righteous life, Sumitra and Kaikeyi also went to heaven. All of them were reunited in heaven with the king Dasaratha. And, Rama propitiated them all by the due

and regular performance of the anniversary ceremonies performed for the welfare of the departed ancestors.

taksam taksasilayam tu puskalam puskalavate

gandharva dese rucire gandharavisaye ca sah (101.11)

After the lapse of several years, Rama's uncle Yudhajit sent his own guru to Rama with a message and a huge load of woollen blankets, precious stones, dresses, and also horses as his present to Rama.

The holy messenger was received by Rama with the greatest of respect, reverence and love. After this, Rama bade him sit on a seat appropriate to a distinguished visitor and enquired after the welfare of his uncle. Then, Rama asked the brahmana: "What was my uncle's message to me?"

The holy messenger said to Rama: "On the banks of the river Sindhu a Gandharva known as Sailuşa lives with thirty million soldiers of extraordinary strength. Pray, conquer them with your own might and enter that city of the Gandharvas. We have no other person to achieve this task."

Rama immediately consented and sent for Bharata_along with his two sons Taksa and Puskala. Pointing to them, Rama said to the brahmana: "These two boys, along with their father Bharata, will soon conquer the Gandharva hordes." Having said so, Rama had the two boys crowned kings of the Gandharva territory, in anticipation of their victory.

The holy messenger thereupon returned to the Kekaya kingdom (of Yudhajit) and Bharata with his two sons set out on his expedition. In a fortnight's time, Bharata reached the Kekaya kingdom and linked up his armies with those of Yudhajit.

The combined armies then attacked the Gandharvas. The fierce battle that ensued lasted seven days. Wishing to terminate the fight, Bharata used a deadly missile known as Samvarta; and in the twinkling of an eye the thirty million Gandharvas were destroyed.

Bharata then entered the Gandharva territory along with his two sons. He established his son Taksa as the king of Taksasila, and his son Puskala as the king of Puskalavata. The two cities greatly prospered under their sovereignty.

Bharata spent five years with his sons in their new territories, and after stabilising their administration, returned to Ayodhya. He bowed down to Rama and informed him of all that had happened. Rama was highly pleased.

kasyacit tv atha kalasya rame dharmapathe sthite

kalas tapasa rupeṇa rajadvaram upagamat (103.1)

Then Rama desired to establish the two sons of Laksmana (Angada and Candraketu) as the rulers of two suitable principalities. Rama said to Laksmana: "These two sons of yours, O Laksmana, are strong and valiant and are fit to be rulers of their own principalities. I shall anoint them kings; think of a suitable territory for each of them. It should be such that the rulers are free from trouble, and the hermitages are free from molestation.

As soon as such territories were found Rama himself anointed the two boys kings: the territory ruled by Angada was known as Angada; and Candraketu was installed on the throne of Candrakanti. Laksmana stayed for some time with them, and when the administration was functioning smoothly, he returned to Ayodhya and to Rama.

As Rama was thus administering his empire, Time (or Death) appeared at the gate of Rama's palace in the guise of an ascetic. The ascetic said to Laksmana: "Pray, inform Rama that a messenger from one who is supremely powerful has arrived and that I would like to speak to Rama."

Laksmana informed Rama of the arrival of the ascetic. Upon Rama's instructions Laksmana led the ascetic to Rama's presence. Rama received the ascetic with great reverence and made him sit on a golden seat. Then, Rama requested the ascetic to convey the message he had.

But the ascetic replied: "I can only reveal the message in private, O Rama. And, whoever hears it or observes the two of us talking should be immediately put to death."

Rama consented to this condition. He installed Laksmana outside the chamber with the strict instruction: "Do not let anyone come in and interrupt this important conversation; any- one who enters the chamber will suffer death." He then turned to the ascetic: "Pray, convey the important message that you have for me."

trayanam api lokanam karyartham mama sambhavah

bhadram te 'stu gamisyami yata eva 'ham agatah (104.18)

When they were alone, the ascetic revealed his true identity as Time (or Death) and submitted to Rama: "O Lord, the creator Brahma sent me to you with this message: Once upon time, you had withdrawn the universe into yourself and were resting on the great ocean. By your own Maya you then created the two powerful beings, Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Upon their destruction, this earth was fashioned from their own flesh. You yourself entrusted the work of protecting this world, to me who was born of the lotus that had sprung from your navel. And I have endeavoured to do my duty, placing the burden upon your shoulders. In course of time, for the destruction of the demons like Ravana, you incarnated on the earth, along with other divine beings. All that has been accomplished and the time for your return is at hand. If, however, you wish to continue to live on the earth, of course you can. If you wish to return to heaven so that heaven could have you as its sovereign, may it be so."

When Rama heard this, he replied: "My manifestation is for the protection of the three worlds, not only of this earth; hence I shall soon depart from this earth. I shall do exactly as the creator, Brahma, says."

As they were thus engaged in the conversation, there appeared at the entrance to the chamber Durvasa, the great sage of terrible anger. He demanded of Laksmana: "Take me to Rama at once." When Laksmana humbly questioned: "May I take a message to Rama, for he is engaged in an important meeting? Or, would you care to wait for a few minutes?" the sage grew terribly angry and said: "Tell Rama this moment that I am here. If you do not, I will curse him, you, your brothers and the whole royal family. I cannot contain my anger."

Hearing these terrible words, Laksmana reflected for a moment: "It is better that I die rather than that this sage should curse the entire royal family." Having thus made up his mind, Laksmana entered the chamber where Rama and the ascetic were engaged in their conversation, and informed Rama of Durvasa's visit.

Rama dismissed the ascetic and came out, bowed to the sage who said to him: "I have fasted for a thousand years; I wish to break the fast just now. Give me food." Rama worshipfully served him with food. He ate and went away.

Thinking of his own terrible promise to the ascetic (that anyone interrupting the conversation would die), Rama became moody.

tyajai 'nam balavan kalo ma pratijnam vṛtha kṛthah

vinasṭayam pratijñayam dharmo 'pi ca layaṁ vrajet (106.9)

tato dharme vinaṣte tu trailokyam sacaracaram

sadevarsiganam sarvam vinasyettu na samsayah (106.10)

Lakşmapa understood Rama's predicament and approached him reverently and said: "Do not be worried on my account; all this is predestined to happen. Throw me out, O Rama, and honour your promise; for when people dishonour their promise they go to hell.

Rama summoned the ministers and the sages in council and informed them of all that had happened. The sage Vasistha then said: "O Rama, I see that the end is coming: and now even Laksmana has to be banished. It has to be done, for the sake of dharma. If dharma is abandoned, there will be universal destruction."

Rama then said to Laksmana: "Banishment is equal to execution, O Laksmana. I banish you from the kingdom." Without even entering his house, Laksmana went away. He reached the bank of the river Sarayu, ready to give up his life, sighing again and again. All the gods appeared in the heaven. Unseen by any human being, Indra took Laksmana bodily to heaven. The gods were delighted that Laksmana, who was inseparable from Rama, had returned to heaven, thus indicating that Rama would soon be with them.

Rama was inconsolable with grief and he said: "I wish to abdicate the throne and retire to the forest; I wish to follow Laksmana." He asked Bharata to ascend the throne.

But the noble Bharata replied: "Oh, no, Rama, I have no desire for the kingdom without you. Install your sons Kusa and Lava on the throne. Let Satrughna also be informed of our decision."

Vasistha said to Rama again: "Rama, look at these citizens who are all grief-stricken." Rama was overcome by sorrow and sighed: "ah, what shall I do?" all of them with one voice said to Rama: "With our wives and children, we shall all go where Rama goes; we shall follow him."

Reflecting over the devotion of the citizens and also the imminent end of his career on earth, Rama that very day installed Kusa and Lava on the throne, apportioning to them suitable territory. He also sent fast messengers to inform Satrughna of his decision.

no 'cchvasat tad ayodhyayam susuksmam api dṛsyate

tiryagyoni gatas ca 'pi sarve ramam anuvratah (109.22)

The messengers conveyed to Satrughna all the news of the events in Ayodhya: "Rama has abdicated his throne, having installed Kusa and Lava on the throne; Kusa rules from his capital Kusavati, and Lava from his capital Sravasti. All the citizens of Ayodhya have decided to follow Rama: the capital is therefore totally deserted. Rama asked us to convey all this to you."

Hearing of the destruction of the family, Satrughna instantly installed his sons on the throne and, alone on his vehicle, drove in great haste to meet Rama. Upon reaching Rama's presence, Satrughna said: "I have enthroned my two sons on the throne, O Rama, and I have decided to follow you." Rama saw the firmness of his determination and acquiesced.

Coming to know of Rama's abdication and of his imminent ascension to heaven, all the vanaras came, led by Sugriva, and even so the gods and the sages rushed to where Rama was. Sugriva had installed Angada on the throne and decided to follow Rama.

When Vibhisapa arrived, Rama quickly said to him: "O Vibhisana, rule the kingdom of Lanka so long as the people wish you to do so, so long as the sun and the moon shine, and so long as my story is narrated in this world. Pray, do not argue. Vibhisana consented.

Rama blessed Hanuman: "Live and rejoice in this world as long as my story is narrated, and adhere to my instructions, O Hanuman." Hanuman bowed his acceptance.

All of them, thereupon, began to move out of Ayodhya. All the weapons, the sages, the brahmanas, the goddess of wealth, the holy scriptures, the holy mantras -- all these followed Rama. Bharata and Satrughna went. All the ministers and the civil servants went. And all the citizens went, too. Not even the smallest creature stayed behind in Ayodhya: all of them followed Rama.

agaccha viṣno bhadram te diṣtya prapto 'si raghava

bhratṛbhih saha devabhih pravi$asva svakam tanum (110.9)

Rama approached the river Sarayu and touched its waters with his feet. To witness this most glorious and auspicious ascension of Rama, all the gods had come in their space vehicles, and the creator Brahma himself came in person in his own celestial vehicle.

Then, the Creator said to Rama: "Come, O Visnu, enter your own divine bodies along with your brothers, Whatever be the form which you wish to assume, that you may assume. Freed from the Maya with which you had covered yourself, you are once again beyond the reach of mind and speech. Pray, ascend to your own abode."

Rama then entered into the spirit of lord Visnu, along with his brothers. Hence, the gods and the sages worship Rama as lord Viṣṇu himself.

Rama said to Brahma the creator: "Assign a celestial region for these, my devotees and followers, O Brahma." Accordingly, Brahma ordained a celestial region known as Santanaka (or Saantanaka), and decreed: "Even subhuman creatures that leave their physical body thinking of you, O Lord, will reach this celestial region.

Sugriva entered the orb of the sun. And the other vanaras who were born of the various divinities re-entered their source. All the citizens and devotees of Rama entered the river Sarayu and were instantly transported to heaven.

Brahma the creator and all the gods in heaven were delighted at the return of Rama and all the divine beings.

This is the Ramayana; the main parts of it were composed by the sage Valmiki and approved by Brahma the creator. It is extremely auspicious, and it destroys the sins of one who is able to read even a small part of it. In fact, this Ramayana is recited and listened to even in heaven. One who reads this daily obtains whatever he desires.

kriya sariro 'dbhava hetur adṛta

priya 'priyau tau bhavatah suraginah

dharme 'tarau tatra punah SarTrakam

punah kriya cakravad iryate bhavah (8)

RAMA said:

All works lead to further bondage and rebirth. Due to love and hatred these actions appear to be different from one another. Man does good and bad actions through attachment, and thus gets more and more births. There is again action after rebirth. In this way the course of worldly life revolves like a wheel.

The root cause of this is ignorance; removal of ignorance is the only means for destroying this course of worldly life. Knowledge alone is capable of annihilating this ignorance. Action cannot destroy it, for it is born of ignorance and is not its contrary or opposite.

The performance of action does not destroy either ignorance or attachment. It leads to further pain of embodiment. Therefore, a wise man should abandon action which is full of defects and devote himself to knowledge and meditation.

Therefore, let the wise man abandon all works. There can be no combination of knowledge with work, because work is op- posed to knowledge. Let him withdraw the senses from all objects and devote himself always to the attainment of self- realisation.

When one attains the supreme light of knowledge in the self, which destroys the idea of the separateness of the supreme self and the individual soul, then Maya along with its offshoots, which causes birth and rebirth and action, vanishes, immediately.

When ignorance has been annihilated by knowledge which is mere luminosity, pure and non-dual, it cannot once again appear; how can avidya cause again actions when it is once destroyed through the knowledge derived from the scriptures?

The Taittiriya Upanisad has zealously declared that one should certainly renounce all actions. The Bṛhadaranyaka Upani- sad also said that knowledge alone leads to moksa; and never any action that is done.

Let one, full of faith and pure-minded, acquiring the grace of the guru, know the oneness of the jiva with Brahman, through the great sentence, 'Tat Tvam asi' (That thou art), and be happy and stable like the Meru mountain.

The way of realising the significance of this sentence is the knowledge of the meaning of the three words therein. 'Tat' and 'Tvam' stand for the supreme self and the individual self; 'asi' signifies the identity of these two.

kadacid atma na mṛto na jayate

na ksiyate na 'pi vivardhate 'navah

nirasta sarva 'tisayah sukhatmakah

svayam prabhab sarva gato 'yam advayah (35)

By eliminating the upadhis -- inwardness and remoteness -- which limit the jiva and Isvara, and the dharmas which make them objects of perception, by taking only their inner essence of pure consciousness through the method of bhaga-tyaga-laksana, and thus knowing one's self, one attains absoluteness.

The gross body which is composed of the five quintuplicated elements, which is the home of the enjoyment of the fruits of action, viz., pain and pleasure, which has a beginning and an end, born of karma and characterised by maya, is the limiting adjunct of the self.

The subtle body consists of the mind, the intellect, the ten senses and the five pranas. It is born of the unquintuplicated elements. It moves the gross body in experiencing plea- sure, etc. This is another limitation of the self.

Maya is the beginningless, inscrutable and most important causal body of the self. It is indescribable. Due to its different modes of limitation, Brahman appears as isvara and jiva. The identification of the self by the self should be practised through logical methods.

The crystal appears to be red when it is placed near a red flower. Even so the self appears to be of the form of the five sheaths because of its proximity to them. When one investigates and meditates on the great sentence, 'asangoyam purusah' (the self is untouched) then he realises that this self is unattached, birthless and non-dual.

The conditions of the intellect are threefold: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. These are due to its association with the qualities of nature. These are really false conditions of the intelligence, for two of them are absent when the other is present. They are not the nature of the supreme Brahman which is eternal, absolute, bliss.

One should negate the whole universe through the "not this, not this" method and taste the immortal essence of the mass of consciousness. One should renounce everything after taking only the essence of existence, just as one throws off the skin and shell of a fruit after sucking its juice.

The self never dies nor is it born. It is not subject to increase or decrease. It is beyond all additions to its great- ness, i.e. unsurpassed. It is of the nature of bliss itself, self-luminous, all-pervading ancient and one without a second.

'hamkara esa prathamah prakalpitah

adhyasa eva 'tmani sarva karane

niramaye brahmani kevale pare (38)

Superimposition is said to be that process by which one thing which is different from another thing is falsely identified with that thing, through delusion. Just as a snake is superimposed on the rope, so also the world is superimposed on Brahman.

The idea of the ego or 'I' is the first superimposition on the self which is free from the imperfection of thought and illusion, and pure consciousness itself. This is all mere wrong identification with the self which is the cause of all, the diseaseless Brahman, the supreme absolute.

The self, the cidabhasa, and the intellect appear to partake of the attributes of each other through mutual connection or superimposition due to existing together, just as iron partakes of the nature of fire when it is placed in the fire. The intelligent nature of the self appears in the intellect and the non-intelligent nature of the intellect appears in the self. This is the cid-jaḍa-granthi or the knot between the self and matter.

I am the great light. I am birthless and non-dual. I am self-luminous. I am extremely pure. I am the mass of pure consciousness, diseaseless, full, the embodiment of bliss, actionless.

I am always free, possessed of unimaginable power, the knowledge which the senses cannot have, without any action; I am infinite, unfathomable. I am day and night meditated upon in their own selves by sages who are devoted to the study of the Veda.

Thus one should always, with an unceasing feeling, meditate on the self. He shall have illumination which will destroy avidya together with its effects, in a very short time, just as a sick person destroys diseases by taking the elixir of life.

One should sit in a lonely place, withdraw the senses from their functioning, restrain the self and win victory over it, and centre oneself in the pure ideal. Thus one should meditate on the One, without any thought of a second being, having the eye of consciousness, and established in the absolute self.

Thus meditating on his self-day and night, the sage should abide, free from all bonds and from egoism, till his prarabdha karma which gave him this present body is exhausted. He shall, then, merge in Me alone.

So long as one does not behold all as Myself, let one practise devotion to Me. I do abide for ever in the heart of him who has intense faith in and devotion to Me.

jnanam hi dvividham proktam svarupam vṛttir ity api

tatra 'dyam nirgunam brahma satya 'nanta sukha 'tmakam (III.27)

Knowledge is said to be of two kinds, viz., essential (svarupa) and psychic (vrtti). Of the two, the first relates to the nirguna Brahman, the true, infinite, blissful absolute.

The other is called the pure psychical existence relating to the undivided spiritual essence of the self. This knowledge again is of two kinds, viz., the indirect and the direct.

The first (indirect knowledge) brings liberation through progressive evolution, when the dissolution of the world of the Creator takes place. The second (direct knowledge) brings im- mediate liberation, here itself, when the prarabdha karma is exhausted.

Those sinful men who are devoid of the consciousness of samadhi, who boast themselves of mere verbal knowledge, who are ever bent on doing whatever they like -- such men go to the region of hell.

How can one, whose mind is not destroyed, free himself_from samsara? How can one, who has no consciousness of samadhi, destroy his mind?

The wise one who is endowed with dispassion, who is ever intent on practising yoga, does not, at any time, fear from any- thing, even from this samsara which is hard to cross.

The great yogi, whose senses have ceased from functioning, who is devoid of mental agitation, etc., who has realised the identity of Brahman and the self, attains immediate liberation.

The great meditation on the attributeless, homogeneous existence-knowledge-bliss absolute, is the highest of all meditations. This is the cause of instantaneous liberation: which is the meditation 'I am Brahman'.

The knowledge of the identity of Brahman and self removes the false identification of the self with the body. He who has no 'I'ness regarding the body is called a jivanmukta.

He to whom the world is neither permanently real nor un- real, and who is rooted in the changeless consciousness, is called a jivanmukta.

He who has the experience of the self in samadhi and has the same experience even after rising from samadhi, who rests in mere self-consciousness alone, is a jivanmukta.

He who appears sometimes like a man of action, or a devotee, sometimes like a yogi, or a sage at other times, in his daily life in the world, is a jivanmukta.

deho 'ham ity ayam bandhah sada brahma 'ham ity ayam

moksas tasmad aham buddhim kuryad brahmani buddhiman (IV.21)

Bondage lies in the belief, 'I am the body. 'Liberation lies in the constant knowledge, 'I am Brahman'. Hence an intelligent man should always meditate as, 'I am Brahman', by melting his ego in the absolute.

He who has self-identification in the body has fear from all sides. Hence, with all possible effort, one should try to renounce the idea that the body is the self.

The jivanmukta, on account of the apparent existence of the body, which persists in him like a burnt cloth, will have to undergo slight temporary miseries, but he has no rebirth, however.

He is a superman in whom peace, self-control and such other virtues constantly emanate from self-knowledge in a spontaneous manner.

He is a superman who never has even the tinge of admiration for even the most marvellous psychic powers.

He is a superman who does not lose himself on seeing the wonderful creations of the Lord.

He is a superman who does not desire, even in his dream, the fourfold salvation like going to the kingdom of God, enjoying the proximity of God, or his form and his power, etc.

One who has forgotten his body is a videhamukta, even when the body which is the effect of prarabdha karma continues to exist.

He is a jivanmukta who has neutralised the effect of the mind-stuff's mutation into thought-forms and who is established in one undivided homogeneous essence, on account of his firm conviction in the illusoriness of everything else.

The objects touch him not, who is established in the one homogeneous essence. Even the gods worship him. The Vedanta proclaims his glory whose delight is in the one homogeneous essence.

He is called, 'one established in wisdom' who considers not even an atom as other than the one homogeneous essence, even for a moment.

He is established in wisdom who is ever undisturbed, who is extremely solemn and deep like the waveless ocean, who is action- less and modificationless, whose condition is similar to that of a python, who is as unshakable as the Meru mountain and who does not even feel, 'I am a videhamukta'. He, though he has a body, is surely a videhamukta (a liberated sage, devoid of body- consciousness).

By continuously meditating on the one homogeneous essence of Brahman, the mind is very quickly destroyed together with its root. This is certain.

APPENDIX – NOTES

JAN. 9th — I have preferred to retain the term 'vanara' instead of adopting the translation 'monkey'; it may mean a member of a forest tribe, especially when we remember that the offspring had the form and the prowess of their divine parents.

JAN. 11th — The weapons: 'bana', which is usually translated into 'arrow', sounds very much like 'bomb' or a missile; even today the word 'bana' is used in South India to refer to fireworks which are projected into space to explode there. 'Dhanus' which is taken to mean 'bow' may be something like a cannon. There were two types of weapons: the Sastra and astra. Sastra was a mechanical device; astra was an astral device.

JAN. 14th — In the light of modern knowledge of military hardware this chapter which mentions very many types of what were obviously missiles, nuclear and non-nuclear ought to be closely studied.

JAN. 15th — The demons in this chapter may be symbolic representations of tornadoes, thunderstorms, etc., and the missiles, the measures taken to deal with them.

JAN. 17th The poet combines in this chapter history, allegory and a moral lesson.

JAN. 18th The story of Ganga may merely be a highly poetic way of describing the natural phenomena.... The story of Uma reveals that the population problem is also a recurrent one.

JAN. 19th Does this story imply that there was a volcanic eruption in the Himalayas?

JAN. 20th Even pollution is not a modern problem!

JAN. 21th The digging of the earth into tunnels refers to the 'moving' away of the continents (the continental drift).... The 'elephants that look like mountains' are supposed to support the earth. Possibly, they are mountains that look like elephants. And, if you visualise the earth suspended in space, the mountains 'stuck' to the sides of the earth seem to carry the earth.

JAN. 28th The cow Sabala reminds us of the Trojan horse....Kambojas may be Cambodians; Yavanas have been identified as Javanese or maybe Chinese or Japanese; and Barbaras -- there was an invasion of Europe by them.... Visvamitra getting the missile secrets from lord Siva reminds us of modern espionage tactics....Vasistha's staff reminds us of the staff of Moses.

JAN. 29th Brahmana' may not refer just to one born as a brahmana (the caste). Sages other than Vasistha (who were also brahmanas by birth) fled. Brahmana, therefore, is a knower of the absolute.... The missiles that are mentioned in this chapter are those that Visvamitra (later) gave to Rama.

JAN. 31st An extraordinary story of space travel, creation of satellites, etc.

FEB. 1st Perhaps there is a lesson here: when the ruler neglects his duty, there is loss of wealth and there is also loss of human life.

FEB. 21st The Gospel of Rama commences here.

FEB. 22nd The words 'krtanta' and 'daiva' mean a lot more than just fate, providence, the fruits of past action, etc. Krtanta means the logical development of one's own action; dàiva means 'divine play' -- in this case Kaikeyi had to do what she did because that is what the gods wanted.

FEB. 23rd Rama (and Valmiki) are fond of using the words 'dharmah sanatanah' while clinching an ethical issue. Hinduism is indigenously known as sanatana dharma.

FEB. 25th	Rama repeats the words 'duhkham ato vanam -- the forest dreadful' nearly in every verse. An effective persuasion technique.
MARCH 10th	The text gives detailed descriptions of the ceremony performed. The description does seem to involve animal sacrifice, though some commentators have given the words a vegetarian meaning. Considering what was said in the last verse of Chapter 52, it is probable that meat was involved both in ritual and diet in the case of members of the royal family and warriors.
MARCH 20th	Cruelty as well as compassion to animals are also age-old.
MARCH 21st	The list of 'sins' mentioned is interesting: the widespread prevalence of these sins is the direct cause of our ills today.... A religious person maintains the sacred fire in his house, as a reminder that that is the end. He offers food into it daily and ultimately the whole body, which also fed on that food, is consigned to the fire.
APRIL 10th	Man's action influences the atmosphere: the fire, the air, and soma (which is not only the moon, but the nitrogenous element in the atmosphere which nourishes the plants.).
APRIL 27th	The juxtaposition of the contrasting descriptions of Rama and Surpanakha is a thrilling piece of poetry.
MAY 1st	The demons with the possible exception of Khara had non-ballistic weapons, and Rama had the most sophisticated of ballistic weapons. 'Bows and arrows' do not fit in at all.
MAY 2nd	This chapter mentions the use of gold and diamond in the manufacture of missiles. * The original text uses a pun in the description of the conquest of these three heroes. Mahakapala means a "Great Skull" whose skull is shattered. Pramathin is one who overpowers: he is overpowered. Sthulaksa is "eye hole": and he is shot through the eye holes.
MAY 3rd	Visnu's weapon is said to be "cakra" which literally means "revolver". Perhaps even then it had a magazine of six chambers!
MAY 4th	Noble truths are often uttered by demons.... Even the 'mace' was a ballistic weapon. It burns.... Killing of fourteen thousand people in an hour and a half is difficult with bow and arrow, but possible with nuclear power.

MAY 23rd	Rama's viraha (expression of sorrow) is graphic, highly poetic and full of spigararasa (love). I have not done full justice to it, nor have I done justice to the descriptions of the seasons in this section.
MAY 27th	Aeroplane pilots used to be scared of vultures in the early days of flying....The description of the knife fixed 'to the bow' is clear enough to indicate the bayonet.... The storm and the cloud left behind indicate jet-propelled craft.
MAY 28th	Once I saw in a medical college museum a monster of the same description as of Kabandha: it was only a foetus.
JUNE 8th	'One piece of cloth' is specified in the text: does a monkey have to wear clothes?
JUNE 11th	There is surely a lot of exaggeration in the shooting story. But the gold-plated missile may be similar to the laser-beam guided missile used by U.S. Air Force pilots in Vietnam who said: "They can find their targets anywhere; even under the bed."
JUNE 16th	One of the synonyms for vanara in the text is vanacarinah which literally means 'one who moves about in the forest.'
JUNE 19th	The verse quoted at the head of this page is most sublime. No translation is adequate. For 'niyati' is untranslatable. It is 'that which keeps the world going'. If this is borne in mind, every time this passage is read, it will reveal a new light. There is a suggestion of an immutable law, unalterable destiny, free-will within bounds, etc., etc.
JUNE 27th	In the description of 'other tribes' words occur which can surely be translated into 'bears' etc. But they could also be the names of tribes of people like nagas of the mod- ern Nagaland, who are not 'snakes', as the word naga means.
JULY 1st	Someone could, without reference to modern geography, draw a map based on these descriptions. Many of our established notions might be shaken up!
JULY 12th	The popular idea is that they were all monkeys who could leap over the ocean. But it should be remembered that tradition has it that Jambavan was a bear: 'leaping' in his case is surely irrelevant. 'Crossing' therefore was by other means.
JULY 13th	Powers to make one's body big and small are acquired by yogis. Warriors love to be glorified, and often they indulge in

using expressions as Hanuman does. The only word that puzzles is 'langulam' which is translated into 'tail': it might even refer to the 'tail' of the cloth worn around the waist which athletes usually tighten before diving, etc.

JULY 15th — The eyes emitting fire and light, a flying object leaving a trail behind (looking like a tail), etc., suggest a jet- propelled rocket or plane. Of course even now we use the expression, "Mr. So-and-so flew from India to America", when we mean he took a plane.

JULY 16th — This, again, may be a picturesque description: as you fly over the ocean, a land-mass or a hill seems to "rise from the ocean" over the horizon!

JULY 17th — This is a nice interlude, or a story with a moral, or it may be a poetic description of Hanuman flying through the eye of a cyclone.

JULY 18th — The phenomenon described in this section may be some kind of a radar tracking station, or some sort of ground-to-air missile system mounted on a ship -- or, it may just be a tough air pocket.... The description of the sky as the path. of musicians proves the existence of radio; and that of the appearance of aircraft is interesting.

JULY 20th — Hanuman assuming a midget figure of the size of a cat may well be true: Yogis are (or were) able to perform this miracle. Or it may merely mean: "the darkness that fell over the city made him inconspicuous and he entered the city softly like a cat".

JULY 28th — 'Dašagriva' etc. are often taken as descriptions of Ravana, and he is assumed to have had ten heads. They might have been mere pet names.... Brahmaraksasa may not be the ghost of a brahmana-killer, as popular belief has it, but a brahmana who is a friend of demons.

AUG. 4th — The physiognomical characteristics of the best among men are described in this chapter.

AUG. 9th — Hanuman's soliloquy on the inevitability of violence, and sita's clever reply to the demonesses may raise questions in our mind. We should remember: "Right action (dharma) is appropriate action, not action according to an inflexible

pattern."... Kinkara kim (what) kara (shall we do) -- a slave who does whatever he is told to do.

AUG. 10th — The destruction of the monument reminds us of Samson's exploits. Incidentally, it is not impossible to believe that such strong vanaras existed who were a lot more powerful than others.... In the description of all these exploits there surely is poetic exaggeration; modern expressions are not free from such hyperbole -- 'skyscraper' is one of them.... Chaitya in the text may not be a shrine but just a monument.

AUG.12th — The description of the aircraft is beautiful. Of course, it says that the craft had eight horses; don't we use the expression 'horse-power' in the same context?... The craft was gold-plated in such a way that it became bullet-proof; so only the engines were vulnerable.

AUG. 13th — Garuda is the name adopted by Indonesian Airlines today. It could have been a similar name in those days.... Tiger- like engines: planes do have names like 'tiger moth'.

AUG. 16th — Hanuman's tail causes a problem here. It might have been the tail of the waist-cloth. Or, it may be an allusion to: Hanuman got into his plane and dropped incendiary bombs on the city (which with the jet-trail might well give the im- pression that drops of fire fall from a tail).... The demi- gods announcing the destruction of Lanka and safety of Sita was a news broadcast.... The whole thing could be a poetic way of painting a simple bombing expedition.

AUG. 18th — Hanuman's narrative indicates that he said to Ravana that Rama had entered into a military alliance with Sugriva. And in accordance with the terms of the agreement, Rama had to kill Vali. This was done. But Rama's statesmanship acquired Vali's equally powerful son Angada as an ally and so he had Angada installed as prince regent.

AUG. 25th — Some of the names of the heroes occur in other scriptures. They do not necessarily refer to the same person.

AUG. 26th — In Chapter 10 the omens are given in great detail and are worth studying.

27th — Sita did not ask for a year's time: Ravana fixed it. Yet, to a confused mind the distinction between fact and fancy is blurred.

AUG. 29th	Rama's words are highly inspiring.... Vibhisana must have flown in and sought 'landing permission' from Sugriva. Radio communication is indicated.
AUG. 30th	Bama's statesmanship is brought out in this chapter.... Suka is the name of a demon here: not to be confused with the sage-author of the Bhagavatam.
AUG. 31st	These two chapters are worth very close investigation. They point to the possibility of altering the geography of the earth by the use of nuclear missiles. There is no doubt that the description relates to a nuclear explosion. Geologists tell us that a great cataclysm turned land into sea and sea into land. Scholars versed in ancient Dravidian lore also tell us that a sudden 'flood' destroyed a once flourishing Dravidian empire, (identified as Gondwana). Without in any way questioning the legendary interpretations, I suggest other points of view.
SEPT. 1st	Nuclear power was used to build a bridge across the ocean.... Devas (beings of light -- television crew) and gandharvas (celestial musicians -- radio newscasters) were watching the work.
SEPT. 2nd	Espionage, counter-espionage, fifth column activities and even betrayals and political asylum -- all these modern incidents of war, are of ancient origin.
SEPT. 3rd	This dialogue indicates that they even had gadgets like binoculars.... Some scholars declare that there have been interpolations in the text. I feel that verses suggesting the vanaras were quadrupeds are such interpolations by those who were firm in their conviction that they were beasts.
AUG.8th	Opposition was permitted even in those days.... The statement that Rama was Visnu occurs explicitly for the first time here.... Spontaneous cross-breeding as portending global change is interesting.
SEPT. 9th	Rama's 'intelligence system' was highly efficient, because of the courage with which he granted asylum to the defector Vibhisana and his four men.
SEPT. 10th	Ravana had only one head and two arms: Dašagriva (ten-necked) was a pet name, even as Sugriva (lovely necked) was.

SEPT. 12th — The words in the text which are usually translated into 'rocks', 'nail', 'teeth' etc., might have been the names of powerful weapons.... However, the assumption that the demons had sophisticated weapons, while in the other army only Rama, Laksmana and Vibhisana had them, provides the moral that if you are on the side of Lord (Rama), you can win a battle even against the most powerful enemy.

SEPT. 13th — Indrajit had some sort of guided missile, filled with poi- son gas.

SEPT. 14th — 'Magic eye' was radar; modern science also uses the words 'magic eye'.... The astras which Rama had were unmistakably nuclear and sound terrible.

SEPT. 15th — Some Muslims believe that Jesus was similarly revived after the crucifixion.... Garuda might have been a real friend, a 'flying doctor'.

SEPT. 16th — What are here described as 'chariots' were the ancient counterparts of the modern 'tanks'; words translated into 'rocks', 'mountain-peaks', 'trees', etc., were powerful mortars fired by cannons, as large and as heavy as mountain- peaks.

SEPT. 18th — Even the accidental bombing of the ground forces of one's own army is not new!

SEPT. 22nd — It is good to remember that the text emphasises that Kumbha- karna was considered even then as an abnormal person.... Same legends have it that Vedavati had risen from the mystic fire in Dandaka (and that Sita had disappeared into the earth), that it was Vedavati disguised as Sita who lived in Lanka, and she in turn entered into the fire, when the real sita emerged, after the great war.

SEPT. 23rd — It is not impossible to believe that Kumbhakarna was in fact a mechanical device, a Trojan horse -- and the story of his sleeping and eating habits is coded allusion to its disuse and reinforcement.

SEPT. 28th — Lance, mallet, mace, iron club, rocks, trees, mountain- tops the description given of their nature suggests that they were some kind of weapons or ballistic missiles which modern science has yet to produce.

SEPT. 30th — A chariot which has ten bows' is surely an armoured car with ten gun-turrets.... The idea of neutralising one missile by a more powerful one is interesting.... The Brahma- missile

seems to have been a sort of mini atomic bomb or bullet used in individual combats, too, though the bigger variety is also mentioned.

OCT.1st Indrajit surely surveyed the battlefield from the air, mistook the leaders as dead, and returned to Lanka. Else, he would have killed them.

OCT. 2nd 'svayambhuvah vallabhena' in the text suggests nuclear force (born of nature), which could kill millions.... The description of Hanuman's (aircraft) suggests a swept-wing super- sonic plane.... Surely they had a quick antidote to nuclear fall-out.... The 'navel' of the earth was the equator or the polar region.

OCT. 3rd Rama's arrows raining fire on the palaces of demons were incendiary rockets.... War-time execution of deserters was known.... This whole page shows that the art of warfare was highly developed then.

OCT. 5th Hanuman's strength could have been derived from certain yoga practices; even today some adepts in the practice of karate, etc., have great strength.

OCT. 6th Indrajit's aircraft was a supersonic jet. Its 'magic pro-perties' is a figure of speech like our own 'phantom jet'.... The illusory Sita was either a 'double' (a ruse adopted in modern wars) or a mechanical but lifelike device.

OCT. 15th Some of the dreadful missiles contained many others.

OCT. 16th The trident, the missiles that became snakes, etc., could well be weapons unknown yet to science; or they could also be magical weapons like the 'rod of Moses'.

OCT. 17th Even bribery and corruption are ancient.

OCT. 18th Omens may be superstition; yet, they generate a certain strength by freeing one from inhibitions.... Worship of sun may include sun-bathing.

OCT. 19th The drums of the celestials and the glorification of the gods refer to broadcast announcements of the V-R (victory over Ravana) Day.

OCT. 21st The specific mention of brahmanas and also Vedic rites proves that the demons were not a class of beings distinct from human, but that it was their behaviour that was diabolical.

NOV. 5th	Pancagni Tapas is: to sit on burning sands with fire on four sides.... The Kumbhakarna story here contradicts the earlier version. Some authors have declared that the whole section 'Uttara Kandam' is an interpolation, an unworthy addition. Several of the stories in this section contradict the earlier ones.
NOV. 19th	This story explains why Vali could not be trusted_by Rama: he was Ravana's friend. And, it also justifies Vali's claim that he could easily have asked Ravana to restore sita to Rama.... This whole section provides the background for the incidents of the previous sections.
NOV. 29th	Suggestive of 'test-tube' babies.
NOV. 30th	Yadu was a demon; lord Krishna was born in the Yadu clan. The descendants need not share their fore-father's nature.
DEC. 25th	The text suggests that the scriptures and the mantras went in human form, i.e. scholars and pandits. In Chapter III.14.15 are several names of creatures with their creation. In Chapter VII.25 are names of some of the foremost among rituals. In Chapter III.25, VI.44.45, and elsewhere the names of missiles are given. In Chapter VI.74, are found names of wonderful herbs. These are worth studying: surely those who are interested will refer to the original sanskrit and with a good dictionary work out their significance. In Chapter IV.40 and the few following ones are the names of places, rivers, mountains, which are worth investigation.
DEC. 26th	There is a sort of foot-note in the last chapter which says that Ayodhya remained deserted till Rsabha became its ruler, when it regained its glory.

GLOSSARY

Agastya --a sage.

Ahalya	-- wife of a sage, seduced by Indra and redeemed by Rama.
Akṣa	-- Ravana's son, killed by Hanuman.
Angada	Vali's son.
Anjana	in previous life a celestial Punjikasthala, daughter of Kunjara, mother of Hanuman.
Asoka	the grove where Sita had been interned
Ayodhya	the capital city of the Kosala kingdom of Dasaratha.
Bharadvaja	- a sage and a great friend of Rama and his brothers.
Bharata	--- a brother of Rama; born of Kaikeyi; he refuses to rule during Rama's exile but lives an ascetic life in Nandigrama with Rama's sandals on the throne.
Brahma	-- the Creator of the universe (Brahma-loka is the region of Brahma).
Brahmacarya	-- the vow of celibacy, the period of student- life.
Brahmana	-- a person belonging to the priest-class.
Citrakoota	-- a hill on which Rama spent some time during his exile.
Danḍakaranya	the great forest where Rama spent his exile.
Dasaratha	-- the king of Kosala, father of Rama
Dusana	-- The commander-in-chief of the forces of Khara.
Gandharva	a celestial musician.
Ganga	-- the holy river, sometimes personified.
Garuda	-- said to be a bird, demi-god and vehicle of Visnu.
Godavari	a river.
Guha	-- a tribal chief greatly devoted to Rama and his brothers whom he entertains on their way to the forest.
Hanuman	a vanara- chief, son of Anjana and Kesari (offspring of vayu, the wind-god), of great strength, who discovered the whereabouts of Sita, and in countless ways contributed to the success of Rama's mission.
Iksvaku	an ancestor of Rama.

Indra	the king of heaven.
Indrajit	-- the son of Ravana, who conquered even Indra; Indrajit was killed by Laksmana.
Jambavan	said to be a bear, a tribai chief and ally of Rama.
Jambumali	-- the first demon killed by Hanuman in Lanka.
Janaka	king of Mithila, adopted father of Sita.
Janasthana	part of the forest, where sages lived and where Khara and his forces harassed the sages.
Jatayu	-- said to be a vulture which fought with Ravana as he flew away with Sita.
Kabandha	-- a demon of unusual shape, whom Rama encounters in the forest (also known as Danu).
Kaikeyi	-- wife of Dasaratha, mother of Bharata; she demanded that Rama be exiled and Bharata crowned king.
Kailasa	-- the legendary abode of lord Siva.
Kausalya	-- wife of Dasaratha, mother of Rama
Kesari	. -- father of Hanuman.
Khara	-- the demon-chief who with thousands of demon-warriors was killed by Rama in Janasthana.
Kişkindha	-- the kingdom of Vali and Sugriva.
Kosala	the kingdom of Dasaratha.
Ksatriya	-- a prince, a warrior.
Kubera	-- the demi-god of wealth, said to be a brother of Ravana.
Kumbhakarna	the demon-brother of Ravana; a warrior of ter- rible power, he slept for long and ate a lot.
Kuša	-- the son of Rama; Sita gave birth to twins Lava and Kuša
Laksmana	-- son of Dasaratha and Sumitra; of the three brothers, Lakşmapa was Rama's constant companion.
Lakşmi	-- goddess of wealth, consort of lord Viṣṇu.
Lanka	-- the kingdom over which Ravana ruled.

Lava	-- son of Rama and Sita.
Mainaka	-- a hill that sprang from the ocean during Hanuman's historic flight to Lanka.
Mandavi	-- wife of Bharata.
Mandodari	Ravana's wife.
Manthara	-- the servant-maid of Kaikeyt, who instigated the latter to have Rama exiled.
Marica	-- a demon and accomplice of Ravana; he was hit by Rama but not killed; later he took the form of a golden deer, luring Rama away; Rama killed him.
Mayavi	-- son of Maya; Mayavi fought with Vali and was killed by the latter after a bitter fight in a cave.
Mithila	-- the capital of Janaka's kingdom.
Nala	-- an ally of Sugriva; Nala was the architect who had the bridge built for Rama and the army to cross over to Lanka.
Nandigrama	the suburb of Ayodhya where Bharata lived an ascetic life during Rama's exile.
Narayana	- one of the Trinity; the protector of the universe; also known as Vişnu.
Nila	-- the commander-in-chief of the vanaras.
Pampa	a lake in the Dandaka forest.
Pancavati	the spot where Rama had a cottage built for his dwelling during the exile.
Parasurama	- said to be a previous incarnation of Visnu; born in a brahmana family, Parasurama kiiled the wicked kings of the world.
Pulastya	the father of Ravana who was also known as Paulastya (and the Ramayana was also known as Paulastya-vadam or the killing of the son of Pulastya).
Puspaka	-- an aircraft of extraordinary manoeuvrability. It originally belonged to Kubera; Ravana took it away from him; Rama used it to return to ayodhya.

Rama	son of Dasaratha and Kausalya; said to be an incarnation of Visnu; the hero of the Ramayana.
Ravana	-- born of a sage, Ravana got a boon of near-invincibility from the Creator; he oppressed the sages, abducted Sita, fought with Rama and was killed by him. He had other nicknames like Dasagriva.
Rsyamuka	the hill where the defeated Sugriva lived be- fore he met Rama.
Rudra	-- the third member of the Trinity; also known as Šiva, Tryambaka etc.
Sabari	-- a female ascetic who was devoted to Rama and who helped him in his search for Sita.
Sagara	-- a king.
Sagara	-- the ocean.
Sampati	said to be a vulture; son of Suparsva; brother of Jatayu; helps Hanuman find Sita.
Sarabhanga	a sage who lived in the Dandaka forest.
Sarama	though a demoness, she was Sita's friend in the asoka-grove.
Sarayu	-- a river, near ayodhya.
Satabali	-- a tribal chief and leader of the vanara forces.
Satrughna	-- a brother of Rama; son of Dasaratha and Su- mitra; he was devoted to Bharata.
Siddha	-- a perfected sage (Siddhasrama - hermitage of such sages).
Simhika	-- a demoness who obstructed Hanuman's flight to Lanka.
Simsapa	-- the tree under which Sita was kept in the asoka-grove.
Sita	adopted daughter of king Janaka; she was the wife of Rama.
Srutakirti	-- the wife of Satrughna.

Subahu	-- a demon who polluted the forest and the sacred rite of Visvamitra; he was killed by Rama.
Sugriva	a vanara-chief; brother of Vali whom he offends on account of a misunderstanding; driven away from the kingdom, Sugriva lives on a nearby hill till Rama kills Vali and installs him on the throne; an ally of Rama, he organised the invasion of Lanka. Ruma was his wife.
Sumantra	-- the charioteer of Rama.
Sumitra	-- one of the wives of Dasaratha; mother of Laksmana and Satrughna.
Surasa	-- mother of nagas; she was an obstacle to Hanuman during his flight to Lanka.
Surpanakha	-- Ravana's sister who tried to seduce Rama in the forest and had her face mutilated by Laksmana.
Susena	-- a tribal chief, leader of Sugriva's forces; also Sugriva's father-in-law.
Tara	wife of Vali.
Taṭaka	-- a demoness who obstructed Visvamitra's religious rite and was killed by Rama (the first demon killed by him).
Trijata	-- a demoness, but a friend of Sita in the asoka-grove.
Trikuta	-- the hill on which Ravana's capital stood..
Ormila	Laksmana's wife
Vali	-- a_vanara-chief; brother of Sugriva; after Rama's alliance with Sugriva, Rama killed Vali.
Valmiki	-- sage and the author of the Ramayana; when Rama banished Sita, she lived in his hermitage, where the twins Lava and Kusa were born, to whom the sage transmitted the Ramayana.
Vanara	-- said to be monkeys; they were probably 'dwellers in the forest'; tribesmen.
Vasistha	- a sage; the spiritual teacher of Janaka and Dasaratha.

Veda	-- the basic scriptures; books of knowledge; four of them were known Ṛg, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva.
Vibhisana	the pious brother of Ravana who abandoned him and sought Rama's asylum; he played a vital part in the defeat of Ravana; he was crowned king of Lanka, after the death of Ravana.
Viradha	the first demon whom Rama killed in the forest life; born of Java and Satahrada; in former life he was the sage Tumburu.
Visvakarma	the architect of the gods.
Visvamitra	a sage who taught the science of warfare to Rama and also gave him many missiles; Visva- mitra was a ksatriya who became a brahmana sage by self-effort.
Yamuna	- a river.
Yudhajit	-- brother of Kaikeyi
Yuga	-- a world-cycle; there are four of them -- Krta, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali.
Yuvaraja	crown prince.

End of the Valmiki’s Ramayana Daily Readings

Thanks